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The reign of Charles III the Fat (876-888)

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THE REIGN OF CHARLES III THE FAT (876-888)

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King's College London

Submitted for the degree of PhD, March 2000



ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the reign of the last Carolingian emperor, Charles the Fat. Because the reign ended in disaster, with the deposition of the emperor and the breakup of the empire, historians have generally been content to write Charles off as a failure, and to interpret his reign as conclusive proof that Carolingian power was in terminal decline during the second half of the ninth century. The thesis challenges this conventional wisdom on two grounds. Firstly, it is conceptually questionable, being largely based on the modern teleological assumptions that the emergence of France and Germany and the development of 'feudalism' were inevitable features of the tenth century, and hence were necessarily preceded by a decline of imperial authority in the ninth. Secondly, it is methodologically unsatisfactory, for, on the one hand, it employs a 'cut and paste' approach to the sources in which pieces of evidence are selected to fit the traditional model without due attention to the distinct aims of the authors of each text, and, on the other, it neglects the evidence of charters which allow different perspectives to those of authorial constructs.

The thesis argues for an alternative interpretation, considering the reign on its own terms rather than as the final chapter in a grand narrative of decline and fall. The methodology is to approach the contours and chronology of contemporary politics through a reassessment of the sources, principally the different versions of the chronicle known as the *Annals of Fulda*, the more elaborate literary works of Abbo of St-Germain and Notker the Stammerer, and the plentiful and underused charters. The conclusions are that many of these texts must be read in a very short-term perspective, relating to developments in Charles's reign rather than to the overall course of Carolingian history; that historians have been too pessimistic about the vitality of Carolingian politics in the late ninth century; and, moreover, that many of the trends thought of as symptomatic of this period, such as the rise of aristocratic power, were in fact ever-present features of the early medieval world, whose greater visibility in the late ninth century was not a cause but a consequence of the fragmentation of the empire.

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Matthew Innes was kind enough to read the whole text in draft, and I have benefited greatly from his advice; he also helpfully gave me copies of work in advance of publication. David Ganz, Paul Kershaw and Geoff West all read parts of the thesis, and I thank them for their perceptive comments, which forced me to think harder about my interpretations. I have profited from conversations with many others at the Institute of Historical Research and elsewhere: in particular, I should like to thank Guy Halsall and Alan Thacker for their help and encouragement. For opportunities to present my research at seminars and conferences, I am grateful to David Bates, David Ditchburn, Elina Screen and Andrew Wareham.

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Last, but by no means least, I thank my family, especially my parents. They have given me much more than I have ever thanked them for, and without their support and generosity I would never have made it this far.

PREFACE

Following conventional practice, I have Anglicised and modernised names of people and places wherever possible. The one exception is Louis the German's eldest son, to whom I refer in the German spelling as Karlmann in order to distinguish him from the west Frankish ruler Carloman II. Monasteries are referred to in the form St-Martin, saints themselves in the form St. Verena.

Due to considerations of space, citations in footnotes are given only in short-title form: consult the bibliography for full details. For the same reason, the footnotes are not intended to be comprehensively bibliographical in the German style. Where the text attempts to characterise the historiography, the reference given is to a representative or recent example. Charters are cited by edition, rather than page, number.

I have used the unconventional abbreviations AFC and BC for, respectively, the Mainz and Bavarian continuations of the *Annales Fuldenses*. The reason for this is to highlight the fact that the former is a direct continuation, by the same author(s), of the 'main body' of the AF, while the latter is to all intents and purposes a separate chronicle.

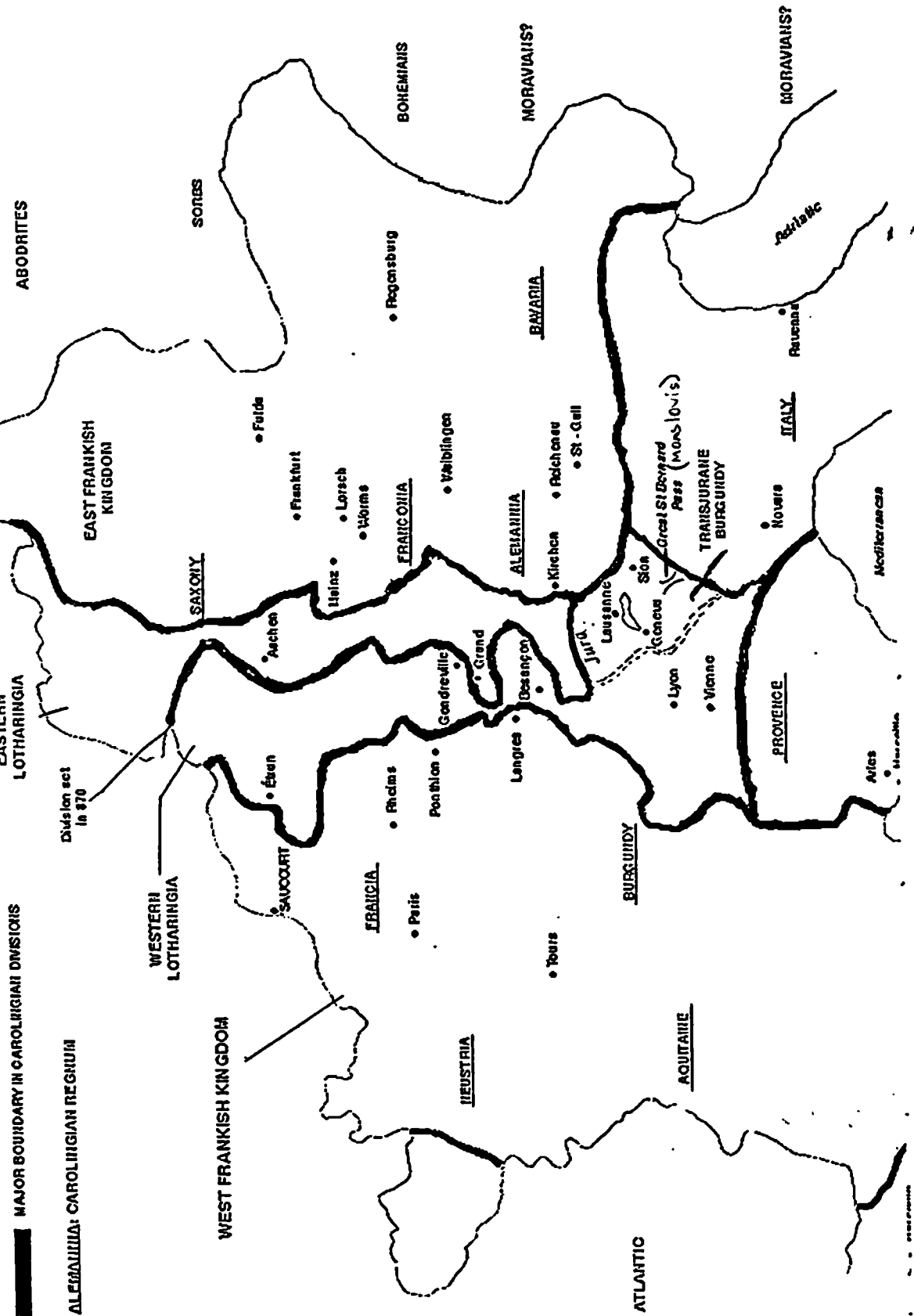
ABBREVIATIONS

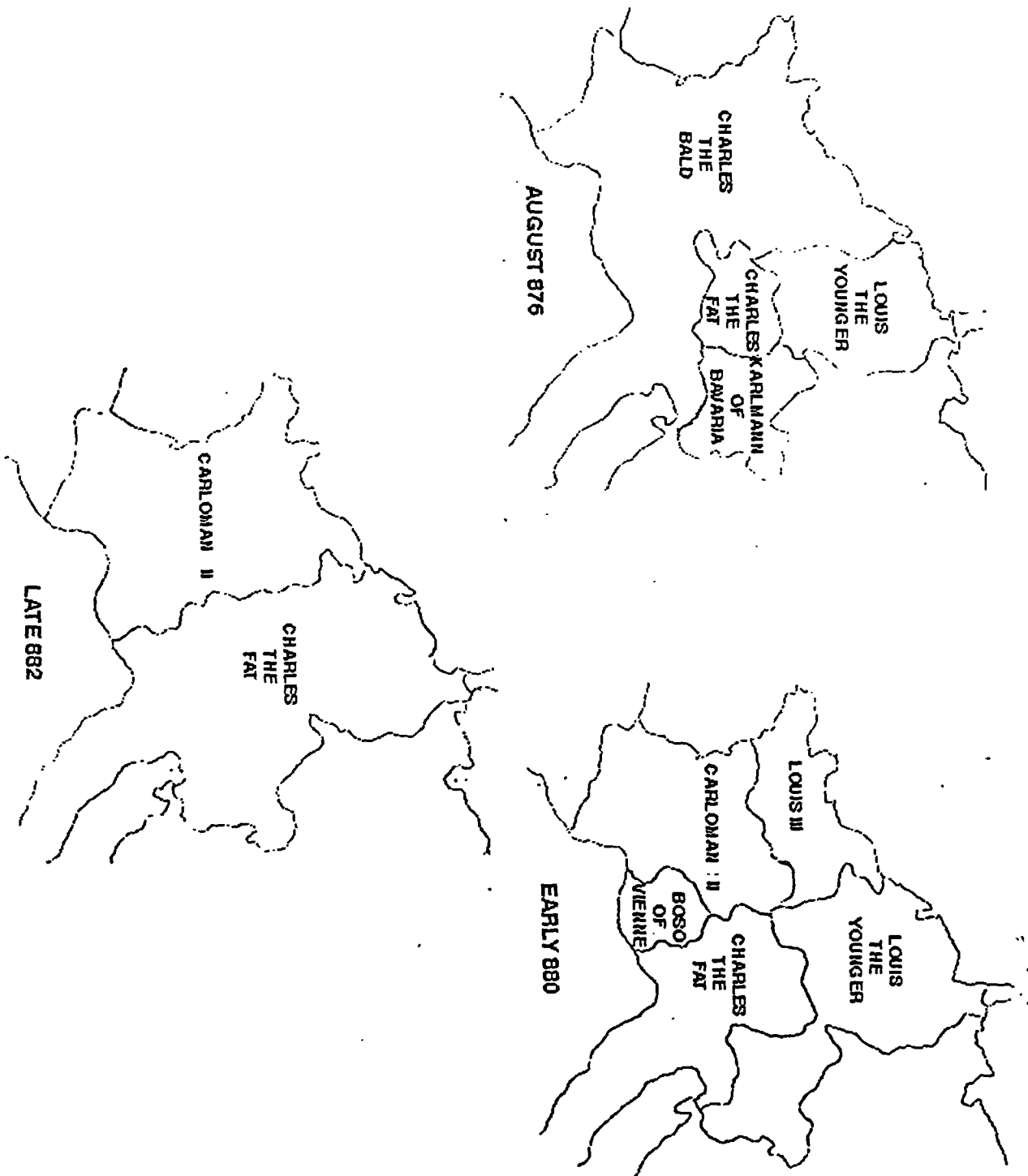
(See Bibliography for full references)

| | |
|-------|--|
| AA | <i>Annales Alamannici</i> |
| AB | <i>Annales Bertiniani</i> |
| AF | <i>Annales Fuldenses</i> |
| AFC | <i>Annales Fuldenses</i> (Mainz continuation) |
| AH | <i>Annales Hildesheimenses</i> |
| AL | <i>Annales Laubiensis</i> |
| ARF | <i>Annales Regni Francorum</i> |
| AS | <i>Annales Iuvanenses</i> |
| ASC | <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> |
| AV | <i>Annales Vedastini</i> |
| AX | <i>Annales Xantenses</i> |
| BC | <i>Annales Fuldenses</i> (Bavarian continuation) |
| BM | Böhmer and Mühlbacher, <i>Regesta Imperii</i> |
| D(D) | Diploma(s) of church/ruler: |
| Ang | Angers |
| Bri | Brioude |
| Bünd | <i>Bündner Urkundenbuch</i> |
| Cluny | Cluny |
| Frei | Freising |
| Laus | Lausanne |
| Lor | Lorsch |
| Reg | Regensburg |
| Sav | Savigny |
| SG | St-Gall |
| SMV | St-Maurice, Vienne |
| Zur | Zurich |
| AC | Arnulf of Carinthia |
| BF | Berengar of Friuli |
| BV | Boso of Vienne |
| C2 | Carloman II |
| CB | Charles the Bald |
| CIII | Charles the Fat |

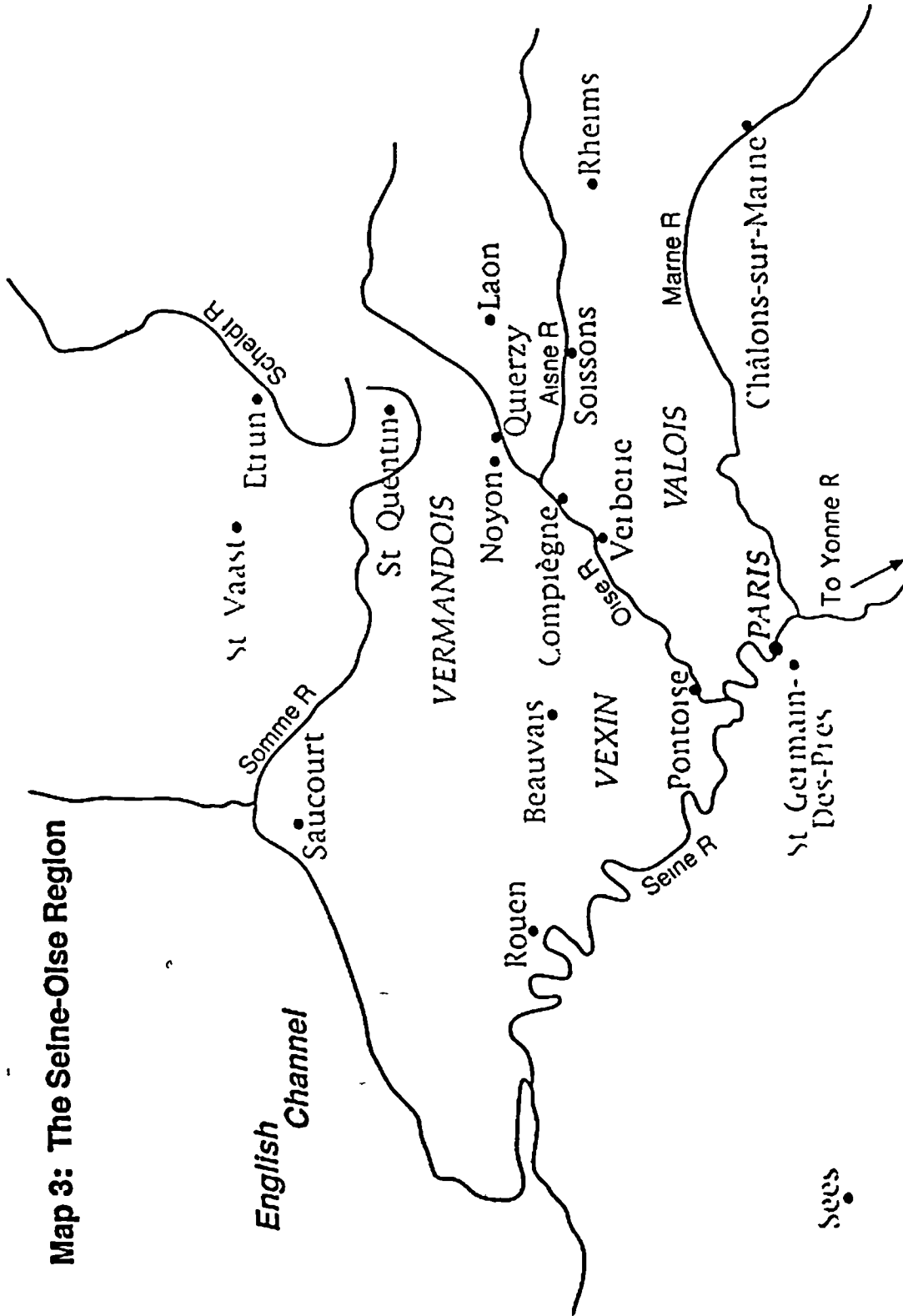
| | |
|------------------|--|
| CS | Charles the Simple |
| K | Karlmann of Bavaria |
| L | Lothar I |
| L2 | Lothar II |
| L3 | Louis III |
| LC | Louis the Child |
| LG | Louis the German |
| LS | Louis the Stammerer |
| LY | Louis the Younger |
| OG | Otto the Great |
| OIII | Otto III |
| OP | Odo of Paris |
| RB | Rudolf of Burgundy |
| Rich | Richgard (see DD CIII) |
| DA | <i>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</i> |
| EME | <i>Early Medieval Europe</i> |
| FMS _t | <i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i> |
| HZ | <i>Historische Zeitschrift</i> |
| JMH | <i>Journal of Medieval History</i> |
| MGH | Monumenta Germaniae Historica |
| Capit | Capitularia regum Francorum |
| Epp | Epistolae |
| SRG | Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi |
| SRG NS | Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, nova series |
| SRL | Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum |
| SS | Scriptores |
| PL | <i>Patrologia Latina</i> |
| QFIAB | <i>Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken</i> |
| Settimane | <i>Settimane di Studi sull' alto medioevo</i> |
| TRHS | <i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i> |
| ZGO | <i>Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins</i> |

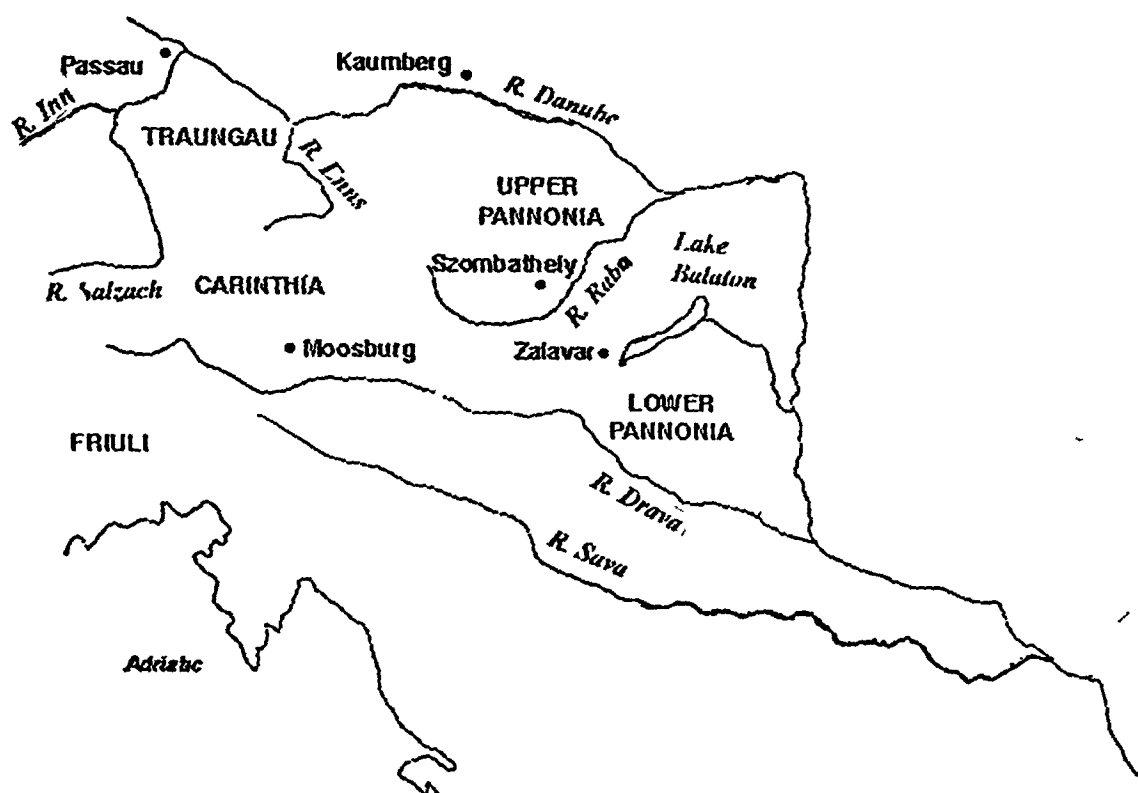
Map 1: The Late Carolingian Empire



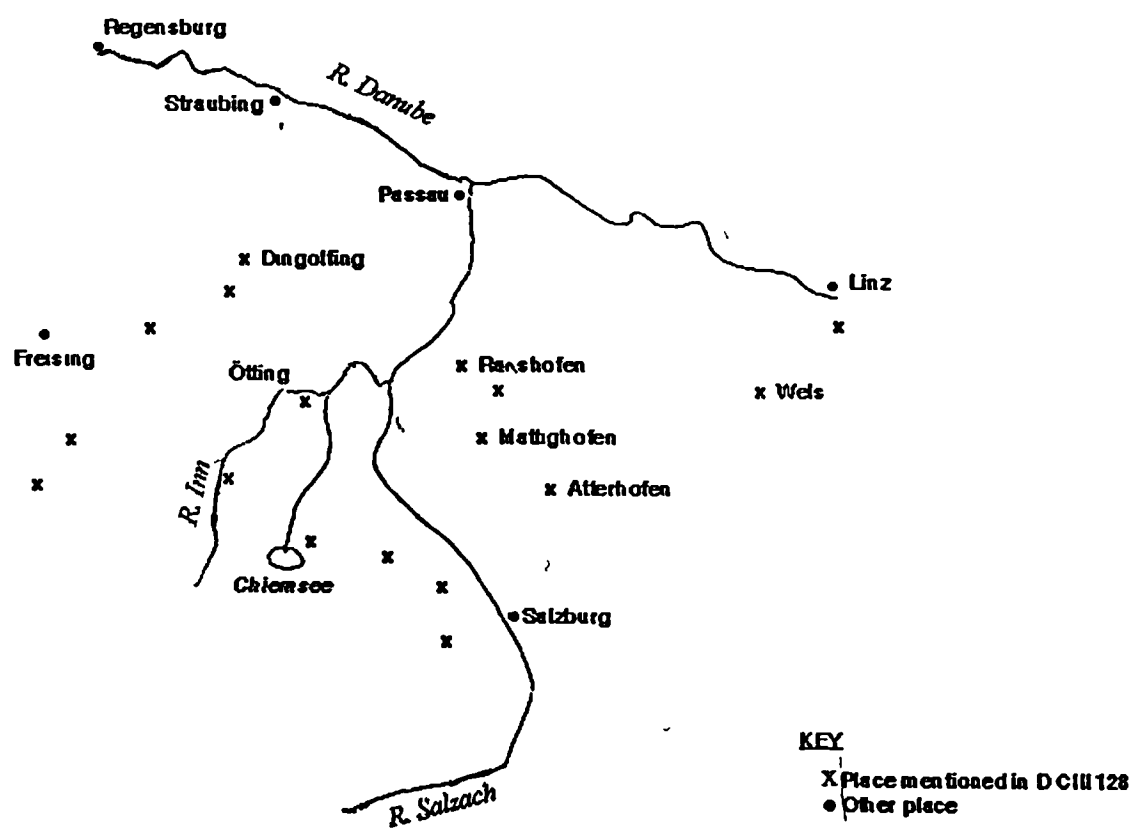
Map 2: Carolingian *Divisiones*

Map 3: The Seine-Oise Region

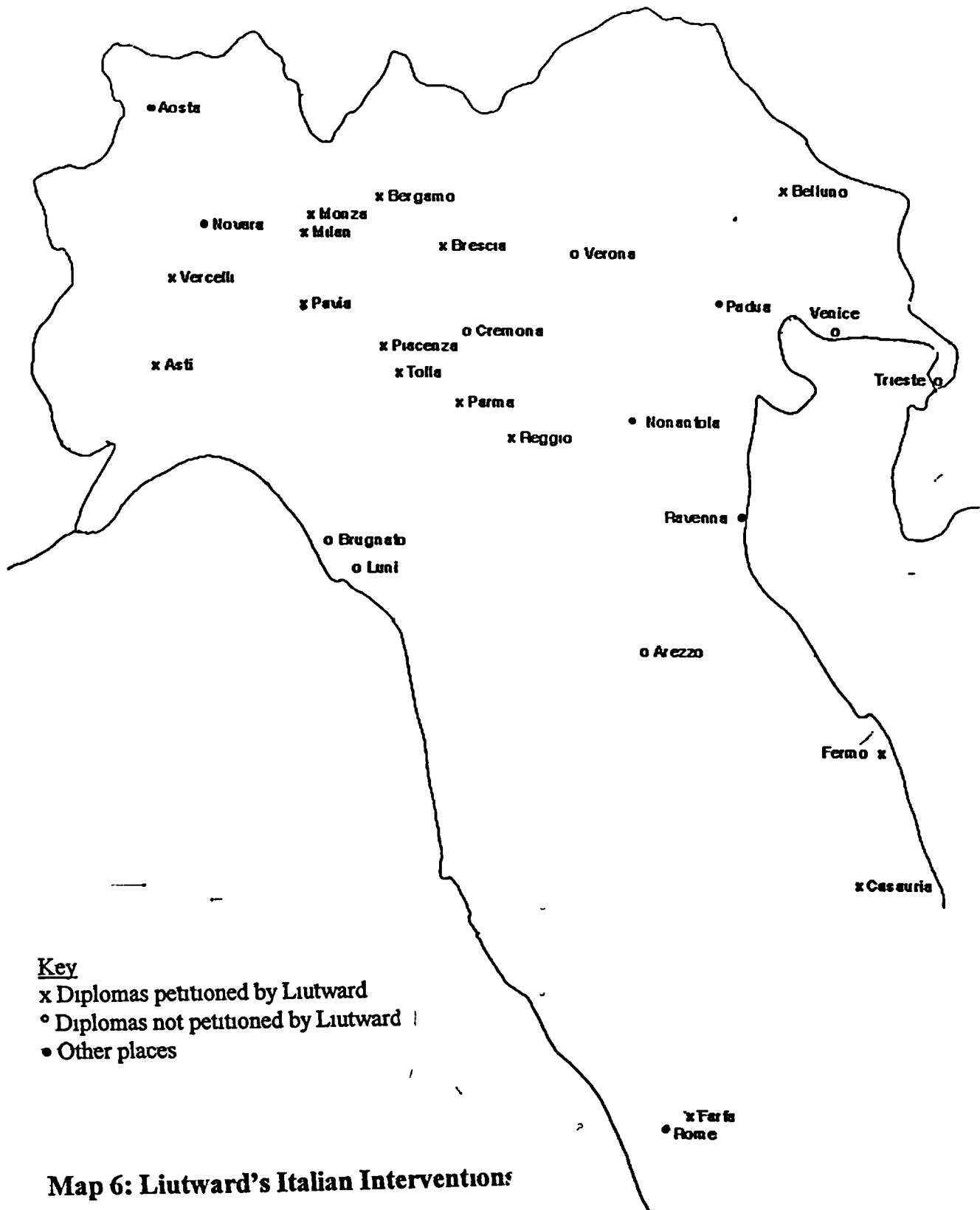


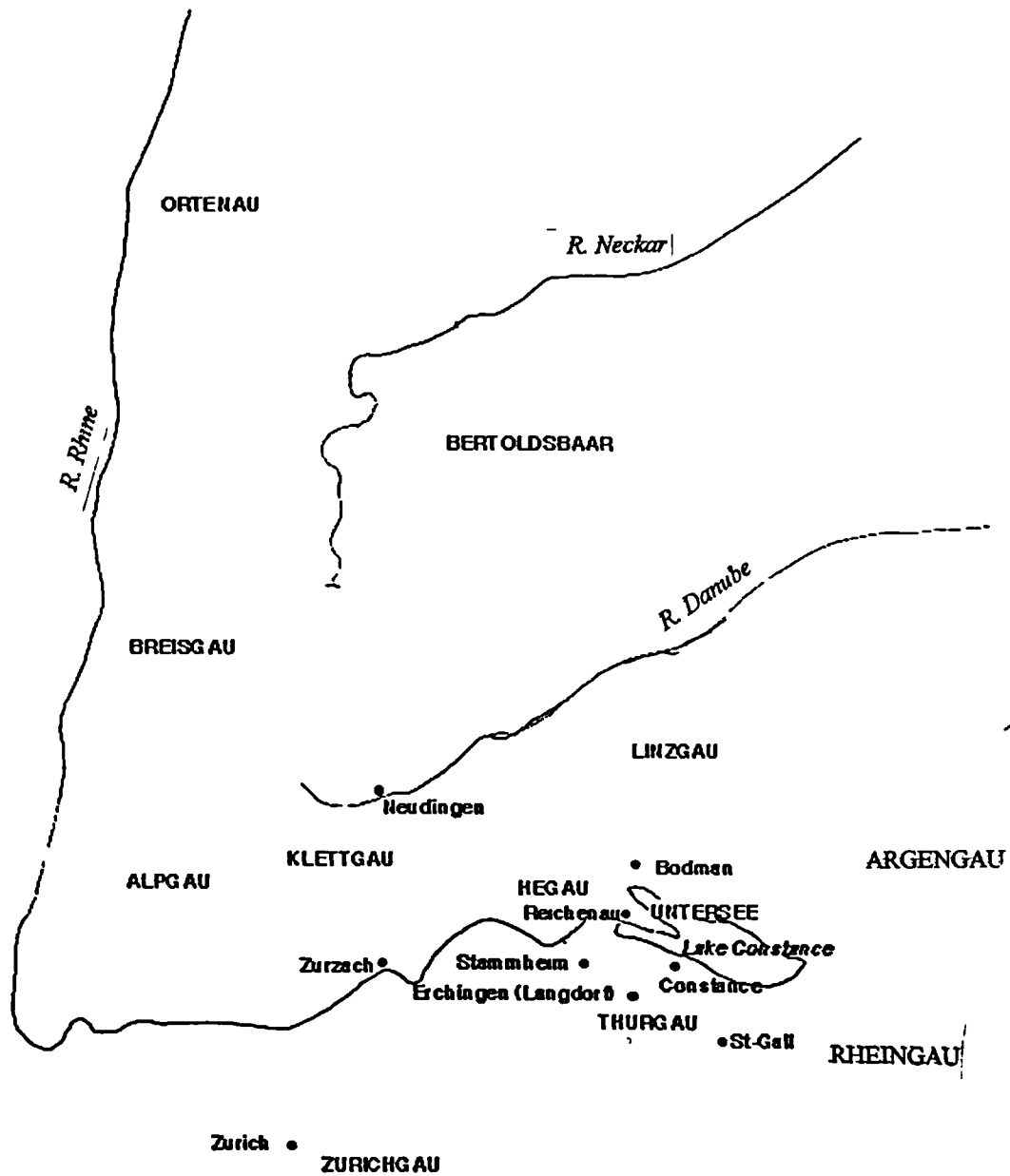


Map 4: Carinthia and Pannonia



Map 5: Fiscal Rights Granted to Ötting in DC III 128

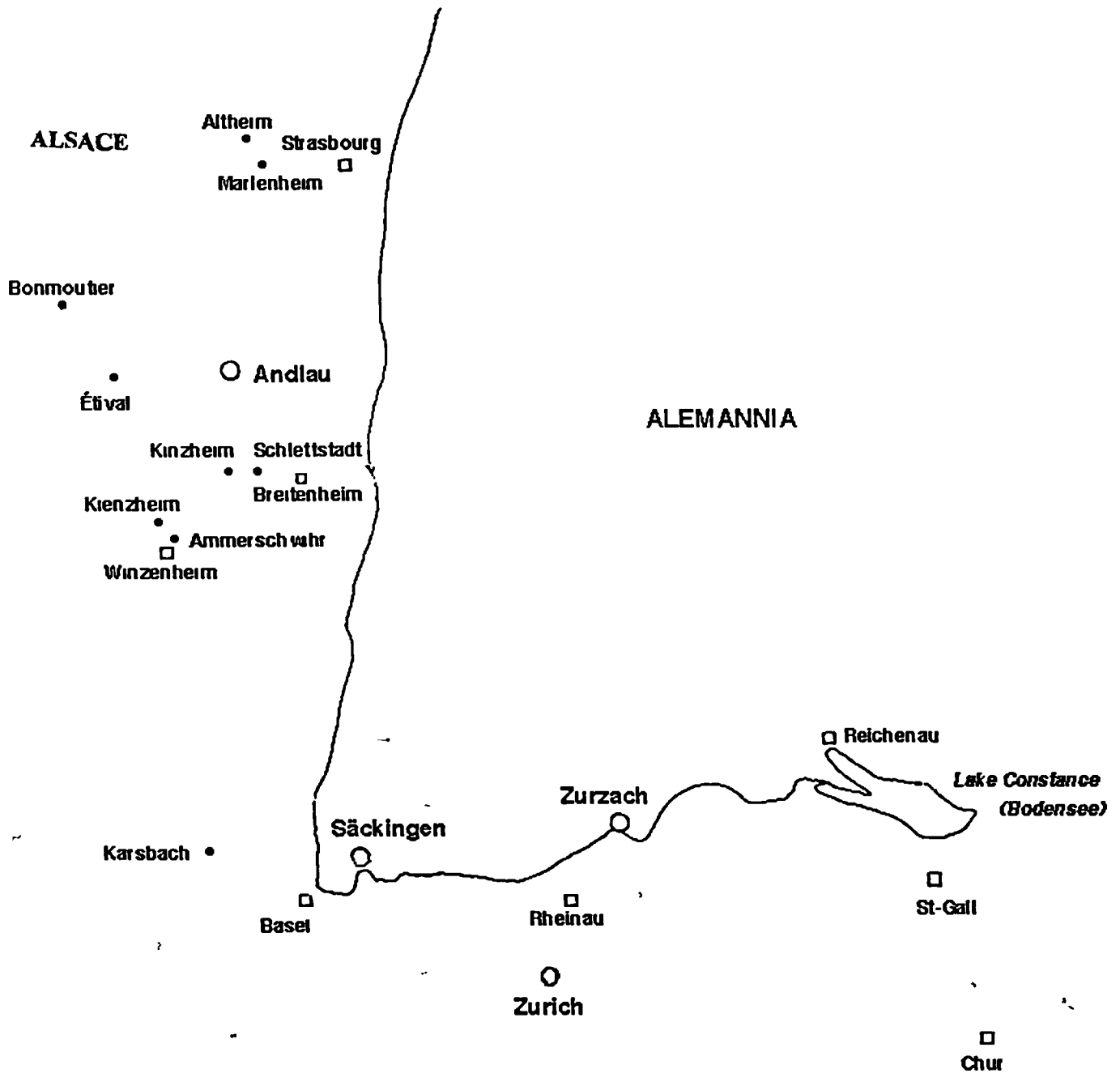




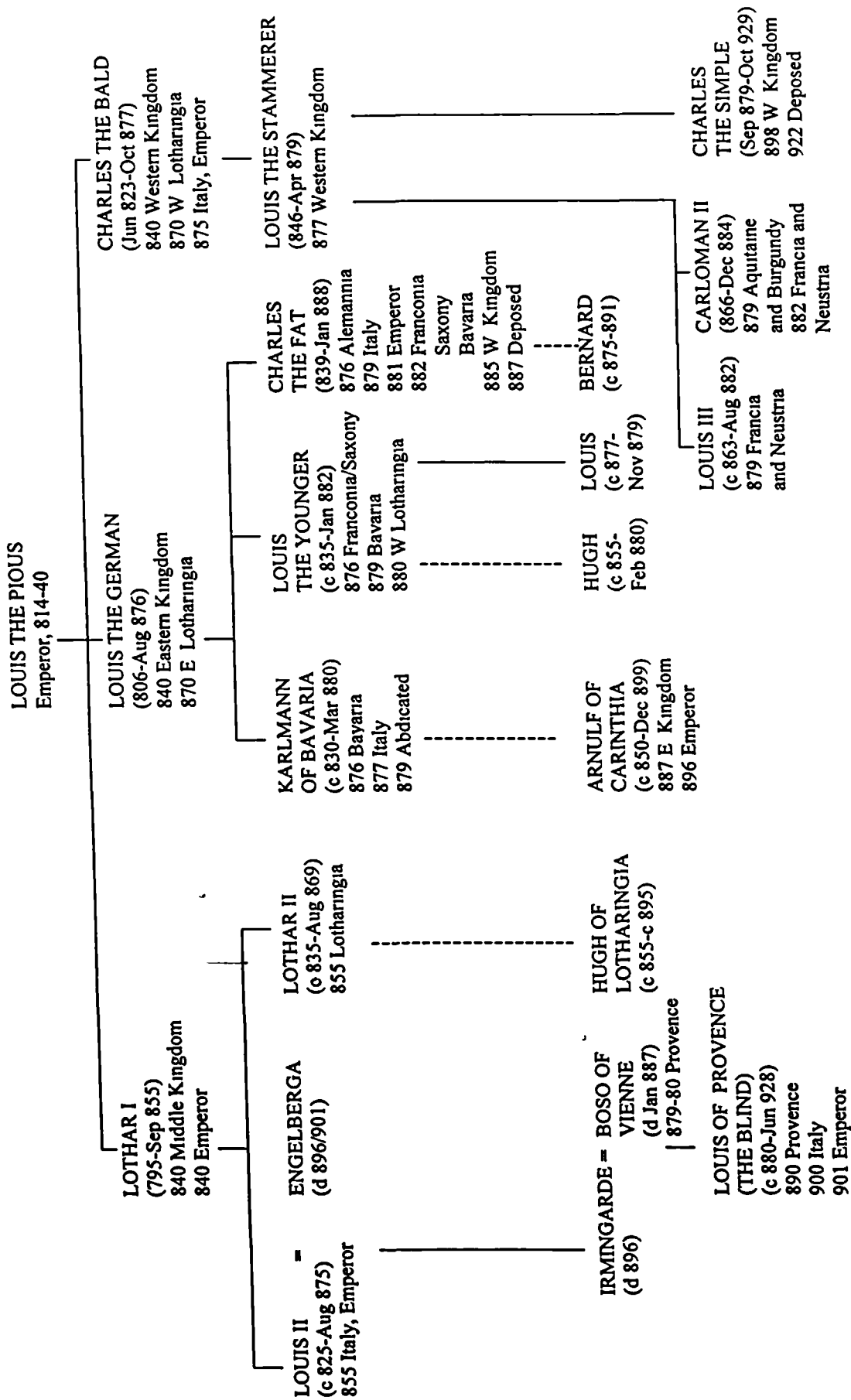
Map 7: Alemannia

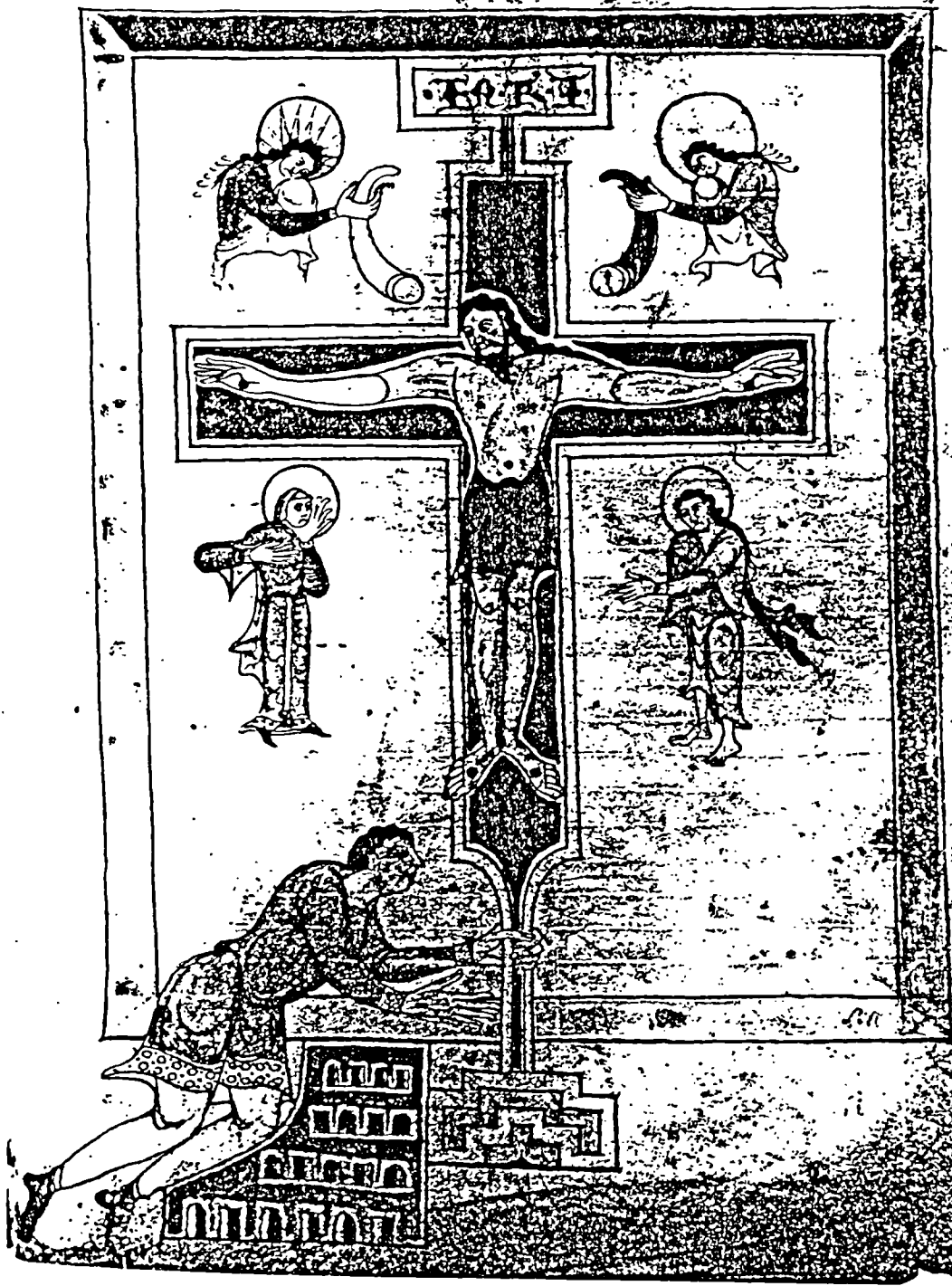
Map 8: Richgard's Monastic Empire

- Richgard's abbeys
- Holdings of Richgard and her abbeys
- Other places



FAMILY TREE (SIMPLIFIED)





12 Ludwig-Psalter. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1: Themes and approaches

Events developed quickly during the reign of Charles the Fat. Although at the time of his succession as king of Alemannia in 876 he was but one king among the several controlling the *regna* of the Carolingian empire, within a decade he had become his dynasty's sole ruling representative. A bewildering mixture of illness and misadventure deprived the Carolingian house of all its other adult legitimate males, and delivered into the hands of Charles first Italy (879), then Bavaria, Franconia and Saxony (882), and finally the west Frankish kingdom (885). From 881 he ruled this comprehensive agglomeration of territories, which ultimately constituted a revival of the empire of Charlemagne, as emperor. However, Charles's unparalleled success in the acquisition of Carolingian kingdoms during his reign has been overshadowed in the eyes of historians by the abject failure of its conclusion, when, in November 887, he was deposed in a palace coup by his nephew Arnulf of Carinthia before dying of natural causes a matter of weeks later. As Charles remained heirless, this event meant that in practice the empire was split up and parts of it made subject to rule by non-Carolingians for the first time since 751. Accordingly, there exists a more or less uniform scholarly consensus that Charles's loss of power reveals him to have been a failure, an unimaginative and personally weak do-nothing ruler in whose feeble grip the Carolingian empire, unprotected from internal conflict and external attack, was allowed to tear itself apart.

As a result of this consensus, the reign has never been considered as requiring a major study. Charles did not find a biographer among those early twentieth-century historians who studied other early kings of 'France' such as Charles the Bald and Charles the Simple, and the handful of articles which have dealt with the reign since then have almost without exception been focused on the emperor's deposition.¹ In view of the wave of reassessment which has in the last two decades swept over the historiography of ninth-century kingship and rehabilitated the historical reputations of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald,

Roger Collins recently observed that perhaps it is now time for Charles the Fat to find his defender.² To some extent, therefore, this thesis may be viewed as a case for the defence.

However, this defence does not arise from a desire to put forward a revisionist argument for its own sake; rather, it seems to me that the issue of how this reign is interpreted has broader implications. The negative scholarly opinion which prevails about Charles the Fat is clearly based less on historians' critical assimilation of all the available evidence than on their presuppositions about the course of Carolingian political history as a whole. It is a commonplace that royal power 'declined' in the later ninth century (according to a recent authority this is 'obvious').³ This model of historical change is held by many historians to have been expressed in a number of ways. To summarise it briefly: while the landed power of the monarchy dwindled, the aristocracy 'rose', assuming ever more regalian rights, taking over defence against the Vikings and ultimately seizing power in 887-8 from a Carolingian dynasty which was drained of its economic and moral authority. This model is still extremely pervasive, yet it relies on quite antiquated and teleological assumptions about the (inevitable, with hindsight) emergence of France and Germany, and the necessity for a crisis in 'public' (royal) power to have preceded the rise of 'private' ('feudal') power. Despite the fact that recent scholarship has seriously undermined the validity of these concepts, the paradigm of Carolingian decline remains in place. Moreover, because Charles's deposition precipitated a fragmentation of the Carolingian empire that turned out to be permanent, his reign is taken as emblematic of the triumph of these processes. All this is posited, however, on at best a very partial reading of the sources from the period. One main aim of this thesis is therefore to examine the different elements of this traditional model in the light of *all* the available evidence, and hence to question the framework within which late Carolingian political history as a whole is understood.

¹ Among the biographies, see Eckel, *Charles*; Favre, *Eudes*; Lot and Halphen, *Règne*. The best-known article is undoubtedly the ubiquitously-cited Keller, 'Sturz', which appeared as long ago as 1966.

² Collins, 'Carolingians', p.109. On Louis and Charles the Bald see Godman and Collins (edd) *Heir*; Nelson, *Charles*.

³ Arnold, *Germany*, pp.34, 82.

The study of political structures ought not, however, to be divorced from the study of political events: prior to addressing the wider issues, we must get our story straight.⁴ This thesis therefore also attempts to work out a more nuanced political narrative for the reign of Charles the Fat than hitherto available, by reading the evidence in the close context of the specific political circumstances of the 870s and 880s, rather than in the light of received opinion about the long-term decline of Carolingian power.

As a consequence of these dual aims, this is not a biography in the strictest sense, and its structure falls somewhere between a chronological and a thematic study. Chapter 2 deals with the main narrative sources for the reign, and argues that historians have been too heavily influenced by the agenda of one particular author, the Mainz continuator of the *Annales Fuldenses*. The next chapter discusses the events surrounding a key moment in the reign, the revolt of Boso in 879, and shows that Charles and his co-rulers used the occasion as an opportunity to secure mutual cooperation for the future, a conclusion which casts a rather more positive light on Carolingian authority in the 880s than is usually allowed. Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with questions of governance and Charles's relationship with the high aristocracy, assessing the evidence for the argument that the period witnessed a decay of the structures of government and a consonant increase in aristocratic authority. Particular attention is paid to the west Frankish evidence, which provides an opportunity to reflect on the extent of loyalty to Charles in the *regnum* which is often thought to have been most resistant to his rule. Chapter 6 is an attempt to reconstruct the events of the period of the emperor's sole rule, between early 885 and late 887, focusing on developments in the politics of the imperial succession and offering a new hypothesis as to the circumstances of Charles's deposition. As this attempt is based on a contextualisation of the changing political positions of the main actors, it necessarily involves further consideration of some of the broader issues of governance and political structures throughout the reign. Finally, no thesis on Charles the Fat would be complete without a discussion of Notker the Stammerer's *Gesta Karoli*, which was written for the emperor and is interpreted in

⁴ As Reynolds, 'Historiography', p.133 has stressed.

chapter 7 as an allusive commentary on some of the main political issues discussed earlier in the thesis. Therefore, aside from historiography and the construction of a political narrative, the recurring themes of the thesis are, unsurprisingly, kingship and royal government.

There is a relatively large body of source material available for the reign, much of it neglected because of a scholarly over-reliance on the evidence of the Mainz continuator (see chapter 2). Among the alternative narratives, we are well served up to 882 by Hincmar's *Annales Bertiniani*, after 882 by the Bavarian continuator of the *Annales Fuldenses*, and for the whole period by the *Annales Vedastini* and Regino of Prüm's *Chronicon*. The more literary material provided by Notker and Abbo of St-Germain-des-Prés brightly illuminates particular moments and events. Perhaps the most neglected of all the classes of evidence are Charles's royal diplomas, of which over 170 are included in Kehr's MGH edition; this high number of charters from a reign lasting only 11 years makes Charles perhaps the best-documented of all the Carolingian kings.⁵ These charters have been used extensively in the thesis as sources of crucial detail on a variety of subjects which remain opaque to historians who content themselves with the more (apparently) self-explanatory narrative sources. Further points will be elucidated from lesser chronicles, letters, and non-royal charters. It is hoped, therefore, that the revised narrative presented in this thesis is based on a more comprehensive range of evidence than that customarily consulted by historians dealing with this period, and hence that its findings will have some validity when brought to bear on broader historiographical issues concerning the collapse of the Carolingian empire.

1.2: Early life, 839-76

Fuller comments on the source material and the historiography are incorporated into the main body of the thesis, and hence no further orientation will be offered here. Instead, by way of a preliminary to the main discussion, it is worthwhile surveying certain aspects of Charles's early life which will help to place the events of the reign proper into context. Our earliest information about

⁵ Bautier, 'Poids' provides statistics.

Charles is a report of his birth in the *Annales Alamannici* for 839.⁶ It is relatively unusual for the year of a king's birth to be reported explicitly in a ninth-century chronicle, and so it is significant that our information comes from a region with which Charles would have very strong associations throughout his life. About his upbringing we know nothing for certain. It is, however, probable that he and his brothers were well-educated at their father's court.⁷ Regino describes the eldest, Karlmann, as 'litteris eruditus', while we know that in later life Charles himself was a borrower of books from the St-Gall monastic library, and was even reputed to have been a composer of church song.⁸ His nickname was not contemporary, and seems to have been ascribed to him no earlier than the twelfth century.⁹

The political position of Louis the German's three sons during his reign was anomalous by comparison to Carolingian practice elsewhere. Presumably keeping in mind the trouble which he and his brothers had caused for their own father in the 830s, Louis elected not to have his children recognised as kings during his lifetime, hoping thus to minimise the possibility that one of them could usurp his position during a rebellion. Each was, nevertheless, given responsibility in a particular region, Karlmann in Carinthia, Louis the Younger in Franconia and Saxony, and Charles the Fat in Alemannia and Alsace. This arrangement was in place by the end of the 850s, cemented in the early 860s by the sons' marriages into important aristocratic families in their designated areas, and sealed by public pronouncement in 865.¹⁰ The powers enjoyed by each of the sons were closely defined: writing in 881, Notker tells us that they were allowed to determine minor judicial cases, while decisions regarding bishops, monasteries and counts, as well as the public fisc and all major judgements, were reserved for their father.¹¹ This information is corroborated by other sources. The *Annales Fuldenses*, for instance, records how Louis and Charles judged cases at Bürstadt in 873, but took

⁶ AA s.a.839, p.178.

⁷ On east Frankish court culture see now Goldberg, 'Kingship'.

⁸ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.880, p.116; Lehmann, *Bibliothekskataloge*, pp.68, 72, 88; Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.46, p.104.

⁹ Nass, *Reichskronik*, p.49 shows how the reference to the name in the *Annalista Saxo*, previously thought to be the earliest, is in fact a late interpolation.

¹⁰ Ado, *Chronicon*, p.325; Borgolte, 'Karl', pp.23-39; Reuter, *Germany*, pp.72-3; Kasten, *Königssöhne*, pp.498-546.

¹¹ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.329.

care to leave those they could not resolve to their father.¹² That Karlmann had similar responsibilities is evident from diplomatic records of some of his judicial decisions.¹³

Despite the apparent restrictiveness of these arrangements, the sons did exercise powers which were quite appropriate to the dignity of Carolingian subkings.¹⁴ Leadership of armies raised from their *regna* came under their remit, especially for Louis and Karlmann, who had marcher responsibilities, but also for Charles, who commanded forces in Moravian territory in 869 and in Italy in 875.¹⁵ Indeed, they were probably seen as the principal intermediate authorities in their *regna*: Karlmann was referred to as 'praelatus Carantanis' by the author of the *Annales Fuldenses*, while Charles was regarded as the 'princeps' or 'rector' of Alemannia.¹⁶ In keeping with this point, the sons were also called in by their father to subscribe those royal charters which pertained to their regions.¹⁷ Accordingly, they seem to have been just as capable of building up networks of association within the aristocracy as were sons of other Carolingian rulers, something which Louis the German presumably intended. For example, when Charles attempted to impose one of his clerics on the vacant see of Lausanne in 877, his choice was partly guided by the hospitality which the candidate had shown towards him while he was still a 'iuuenculus'.¹⁸ Likewise, many of the men who came to populate Charles's court were Alemans who had begun their careers in the entourage of the future king before 876.¹⁹ Louis the Younger enjoyed a similar degree of association with his men: when a fight threatened to break out between the Franks and Saxons at a royal assembly held in 875 at Tribur, it was he and not his father who intervened to keep the peace.²⁰ Evidently,

¹² AF s.a.873, p.78.

¹³ D Frei 898.

¹⁴ As Kasten, *Königssöhne*, pp.220-37 has recently emphasised, subkingship was defined less in titular/institutional than in familial terms.

¹⁵ For example, AF s.a.858, p.49; 870, p.70 (Karlmann); AF s.a.854, p.44; 869, pp.68-9 (Louis); AF s.a.869, pp.68-9; AB s.a.875, p.198 (Charles). AB s.a.872, p.186 is instructive, revealing the significance of Louis's and Charles's armies by their absence.

¹⁶ AF s.a.863, p.56; Borgolte, 'Karl', pp.23-35.

¹⁷ DD LG 82-3, 105, 110, 116, 119, 145, 161, 163-5.

¹⁸ *Collectio Sangallensis*, no.26.

¹⁹ Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, pp.189-98.

²⁰ AF s.a.875, p.83. See Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.119-28 for Karlmann and the aristocracy of the south-west.

the sons were already beginning to exert strong influence in their delegated commands before their father's death. As the eulogistic terminology of a poem composed for an *adventus* of Charles the Fat to the monastery of St-Gall reveals, while the sons may ordinarily have avoided having themselves addressed as kings, they eschewed few of the other trappings of kingship.²¹

Despite the ultimate success of Louis the German's succession plan, which was put into effect in 876 in a form almost identical to its original conception some two decades earlier, it did not eradicate the propensity of Carolingian sons to revolt against their fathers. Before the official promulgation of the project in 865, Karlmann was the unhappy party, twice rising against his father.²² Thereafter, however, the two younger sons were the troublemakers, apparently due to their suspicion that Karlmann was receiving preferential treatment.²³ Louis the German may, as Borgolte has suggested, have intended Karlmann to enjoy some sort of general superiority over his brothers.²⁴ This may have included the incorporation of eastern Lotharingia into Karlmann's portion after its annexation to east Francia in 870, as it is he, rather than Louis the Younger or Charles the Fat, who intervenes for a royal charter in favour of the key Lotharingian royal monastery of Prüm in 871.²⁵ If the plan was altered in this way at this time, we would also have an explanation as to why Louis and Charles went into rebellion in 872 in an attempt to force their father to reconfirm the 865 promulgation.²⁶ The success of Louis the German's family politics was therefore not achieved without a struggle, and its ultimate implementation was only assured by his willingness to compromise with his sons when circumstances demanded it (a flexibility not always evident in the attitude of Charles the Bald). As will be argued in chapter 6, in this respect Louis showed more political sagacity than his youngest son, whose intransigence on the identity of his own successor was ultimately the cause of his undoing.

²¹ Bulst, '*Susceptacula*', pp.135-8. Charles had himself commemorated at Remiremont as *rex*, probably while in rebellion against his father in 872: *Liber memorialis Romaricensis*, fol.9r; Tellenbach, '*Gedenkbücher*', pp.396-9.

²² AF s.a.861, p.55; 863, p.56.

²³ AF s.a.866, pp.64-5; 871, pp.72-3; 872, p.75; 873, p.77; 874, pp.81-2.

²⁴ Borgolte, '*Karl*', pp.50-4.

²⁵ D LG 141.

²⁶ AF s.a.872, p.75.

These introductory remarks cannot conclude without some mention of the most famous event connected with Charles's pre-kingship years, namely the attempt at worldly renunciation he apparently made in January 873 during a royal assembly in Frankfurt. This incident, which was reported in detail in no less than three major contemporary sources, clearly created quite a stir throughout the empire's political circles.²⁷ Noticeably, our main witnesses interpret the event rhetorically to suit their own agendas. For Hincmar, Charles's attempt to renounce the world (by removing his belt and sword and declaring that he would abstain from sexual intercourse) was a righteous response to a diabolical attempt to induce him into revolt; his contrition therefore provided an admirable contrast to the wilful behaviour of Charles the Bald's rebellious son Carloman.²⁸ The author of the *Annales Fuldenses* also read Charles's actions as evidence of his being under the influence of Satan. For this author as well, Charles was repentant as he confessed his sins, while the moral of obedience drawn was directed at Louis the Younger, who was harbouring secret plans to rebel. Despite these differences in presentation, the sources agree that Charles performed a penance or confession in public, that he was possessed by the devil, and that he was freed from this in a religious ceremony in church thanks to clerical intervention. These circumstances constituted highly unusual behaviour for a member of the royal house to display in public, and account for the incident's fame. Charles's actions, whether motivated by remorse or by a true desire for withdrawal, may stand as a sign that, as an educated layman, he had absorbed the spiritual exhortations of the church to such an extent that he was having trouble reconciling them with the demands of his secular role.²⁹ These tensions were brought to a head by the temptation he felt at Frankfurt and his conspiracy with Louis the Younger. Perhaps it was this internal conflict which Notker had in mind when, in terms which echoed the report of Hincmar, he reminded Charles later in life of 'eis rebus et negociis, sine quibus res publica terrena non subsistit, coniugio videlicet usuque armorum.'³⁰

²⁷ AF s.a.873, pp.77-8; AB s.a.873, pp.190-2; AX s.a.873, pp.31-2.

²⁸ Nelson, 'Tale', pp.121-5.

²⁹ See Nelson, 'Monks', pp.124-5, 138-40.

³⁰ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.10, p.66.

With all these circumstances in mind, I would suggest that one further source, this time iconographical, contains a record of the events at the 873 royal assembly. The so-called *Ludwigspsalter* was put together in the second quarter of the ninth century at the monastery of St-Amand, probably as a gift for Louis the German from his father or brother.³¹ Sometime in the third quarter of the ninth century at a scriptorium in Alemannia or Alsace, three of the codex's blank protective leaves were filled with additions: on folio 1v extracts from Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*, on folios 119r-119v in the same hand a prayer entitled *Oratio ante crucem dicenda*, and on folio 120r a crucifixion scene. In the latter, Christ hangs from a cross while a man kneels in proskynesis at the base.³² The man is dressed only in a brown tunic and shoes, but has been generally identified as a king engaged in an act of humility on the grounds that he bears no clerical marks of office. For some time it was believed by scholars that the figure represented Charles the Fat, and that the additions to the manuscript were made as part of formal deposition proceedings in late 887.³³ This theory has now, however, been terminally weakened on the basis of its proponents' misuse of the 887 evidence and of their problematic interpretative assumptions.³⁴ More recently, Goldberg has cogently argued that the image actually shows Louis the German performing a political ritual of humility connected with the public celebration of a military victory.³⁵ Such rituals, he maintains, were central to Louis's understanding of his own kingship, and acted as a focal point for the political community of the east Frankish kingdom.

Although Goldberg's arguments are, on the whole, persuasive, certain aspects of his case allow a different interpretation of the *Ludwigspsalter* to be forwarded. Goldberg identifies similarities between the codex's ruler image and a manuscript of Otfrid of Weißenburg's *Liber evangeliorum*, ingeniously and convincingly demonstrating that the Otfrid manuscript was the direct model for the *Ludwigspsalter*'s depiction of royal humility, while the latter's frontispiece

³¹ For the following see, most recently, Goldberg, 'Kingship', pp.67-9. The relevant facsimiles are provided by Jammers, 'Ludwigspsalter'.

³² See Figure 2.

³³ Jammers, 'Ludwigspsalter'.

³⁴ Bund, *Thronsturz*, pp.547-9.

³⁵ Goldberg, 'Kingship', esp. pp.67-72.

was the key influence on the equivalent page of the *Liber*.³⁶ Because the *Liber* can be quite firmly dated, by virtue of its dedications, to 863x871, and because the *Ludwigpsalter*'s additions can be placed in Alemannia or Alsace in the period 850x875, Goldberg assumes that the manuscripts' cross-fertilisation took place at the Alsatian monastery of Weißenburg at around the time the *Liber* was being completed. Although this dating is a plausible speculation, it is by no means decisive, for it implies that the Weißenburg artist who added the ruler portrait to the psalter did so more or less autonomously as a gift for Louis the German. However, the bold nature of the additions suggests that they were done in accordance with a royal commission, or at least for a particular occasion, as depictions of kings in this period tended to be. The famous events of January 873 therefore come into consideration.³⁷ Five points support the suggestion that it was this occasion to which the picture in the psalter referred.

Firstly, the figure seems to have been depicted as quite youthful, and does not obviously resemble a man in his 60s, as Louis the German was by this time. Secondly, Charles the Fat's reported actions at that assembly fit the image of the man in the picture. As we have seen, he performed some kind of public penance or other act of humility in a religious context, and seems also to have stripped himself of his badges of status, his sword and belt. Thirdly, there are important chronological considerations which must be taken into account. Although Goldberg's arguments for the political importance of the cult of the cross at Louis the German's court are broadly convincing, his evidence only gains force cumulatively, and he fails to make a clear distinction, which is important to his argument, between the use of cross-shaped banners and reliquaries on the one hand, and on the other the use of relics of the True Cross itself.³⁸ Rituals centering on fragments of the True Cross surely had a different (and greater) significance in court circles than simply the use of cross imagery: it was, after all, a fairly universal Christian symbol. Moreover, drawn images of the cross were not, as Goldberg assumes, always interpreted after the fashion of Constantine's vision as

³⁶ Ibid, p.67 and n.108.

³⁷ As tentatively suggested by Bund, *Thronsturz*, p.549.

simple emblems of imperial victory, but could also imply a theophany, a representation of divinity itself.³⁹ That the cross before which the humble layman abases himself in the *Ludwigspsalter* actually had a figure of Christ on it may indeed suggest that it was meant to convey more than a sign of triumph, and indeed referred to the True Cross itself. In view of all this, it is important to note that the east Frankish court did not receive its relic of the *lignum sanctae crucis* until the visit of Byzantine ambassadors in 872, at least a year after the completion of Otfrid's *Liber evangeliorum*.⁴⁰

Fourthly, the added text *Oratio ante crucem dicenda* also seems to fit the circumstances of 873.⁴¹ The prayer, addressed (unsurprisingly) to Christ, is concerned with the rejection of 'diabolicae pompae', perhaps of the kind which Charles was tempted by, and with the renunciation of worldly sins such as covetousness and avarice, which were central to the issues at stake in the rebellions of the early 870s. The overall theme of the prayer is the reconciliation of a sinner with Christ, a reconciliation which is to take place (in support of the previous point) through the medium of the wood of the True Cross. Fifthly and finally, a direct connection between the Frankfurt 'penance' of Charles the Fat and the additions to the *Ludwigspsalter* is provided in the shape of Archbishop Liutbert of Mainz. Liutbert, who became archchaplain and archchancellor in 870, was one of the dedicatees of Otfrid's *Liber evangeliorum*. Moreover, from 870 at the earliest, he was also abbot of Weißenburg, the monastery where, as Goldberg shows, the addition of the ruler portrait to the psalter, on the model of Otfrid's *Liber*, was effected. He is thus a good candidate to consider as the instigator of the additions. Furthermore, Liutbert was identified by Hincmar as being closely involved in ridding Charles of his 'possession' in the church at Frankfurt, by donning his priestly garb and presiding over a mass.⁴² In 887 it was Liutbert whom Charles sent to Arnulf with the east Frankish fragment of the Cross to

³⁸ Goldberg, 'Kingship', pp.61-2 with n.88 for his collection of references, hardly any of which can be assumed to definitely refer to actual relics of the Cross; the distinction is muddled by the argument at p.64.

³⁹ Frolow, 'NIKA', pp.102-3; Brubaker, *Vision*, pp.154-7.

⁴⁰ AF s.a.872, p.75.

⁴¹ Jammers, 'Ludwigspsalter', pp.261-2 for the text.

⁴² AB s.a.873, p.191. AX s.a.873, p.32 does not mention Liutbert by name but says that Charles was exorcised by 'orationum suffragiis et coniurationibus diversorum sacerdotum'.

remind him of his fidelity to the emperor: might the archbishop, in his capacity as head of the royal chapel, have been responsible for the relic's custody after its arrival in 872?

Liutbert is thus a key figure linking together the strands connecting the *Liber evangeliorum* which influenced the psalter's additions, the relic of the True Cross which was depicted in the ruler image, the monastery of Weißenburg where the additions were made, and the royal assembly at Frankfurt. It is therefore possible that the additions to the psalter were made on his orders at the behest of Louis the German. The theme of the *Oratio* and of the image is repentance and reconciliation, a theme shared by our literary representations of Charles's outburst in 873, which was provoked by remorse over a rebellion plan to which he was party. A ritual of humility, a public display of contrition, was desirable to both parties: it allowed Charles to retake his position in the world with a calm conscience, while for Louis it counted as a symbol of submission and, as the author of the Mainz-based *Annales Fuldenses* thought, a sign of his goodness. The aftermath of the incident was marked by rituals of reconciliation. First, Charles was sent by his father round the shrines of the martyrs 'to recover his sanity', and then, presumably in an effort to reassure all concerned that the previously-agreed succession plan was still in place, Louis and his two rebellious sons sat together in judgement at Bürstadt, with the sons publicly deferring to their father's superior status in certain cases.⁴³ Might not the additions to the *Ludwigpsalter* have been made as part of this process of reconciliation, as a reminder of Charles's contrition and the restoration of peace and harmony between father and son?

The renewed concord between the two prevailed for the short remainder of Louis's reign. However, while the king's death in August 876 may have seen his long-planned succession project actually implemented, a rare mark of distinction for any early medieval king, the division of the east Frankish kingdom reignited the potential for discord between his sons. As the next chapter will show, it was

⁴³ AB s.a.873, p.192, where Hincmar also says that Louis initially planned to send Charles to Rome before other matters intervened; these, perhaps, were the judicial hearings mentioned by AF s.a.873, p.78. The latter example also shows the sons deferring to their father's familial superiority, in which terms Carolingian political hierarchy was customarily couched.

to be Liutbert, Charles's protector in 873, whose supervision of the so-called *Annales Fuldenses* in the kingdom of Louis the Younger ensured a concerted attempt was made to blacken the name of Charles the Fat, an attempt which has succeeded in profoundly influencing the views of almost every historian who has studied the reign since.

2: CHARLES THE FAT AND THE *ANNALES FULDENSES*, 882-7

2.1: A failed king

From the reams of pages which have been devoted by historians to the practice of Carolingian kingship, perhaps only Charles the Fat has emerged with the reputation of a 'failed king'.¹ This judgement is all the more striking in that it has been postulated in broadly similar terms by almost every historian who has ever had occasion to mention him. The uniformity of opinion has proved remarkably impervious to changes in both time and historiographical genre. Thus while the tone of Stubbs's judgement, that Charles was 'dangerous and unmanageable; a diseased, idiotic raving madman...who was probably put out of the way for his own good' could easily be put down to his Victorian sensibilities and nineteenth-century ideas about the asylum, it is significant that Fried's judgement of Charles in his monumental history of Germany, published as recently as 1994, was expressed using the same idiom and vocabulary.² Likewise, specialised articles on the reign are no less likely to comment negatively on Charles's rule and abilities than textbook summaries of the period.³

This generally-held belief in the personal inadequacy of Charles to fulfil the office of kingship is frequently expressed in terms of three quite specific major criticisms which are met again and again in the modern historiography. These are: firstly, that he was dominated by his advisers, especially his archchancellor Liutward of Vercelli⁴; secondly, that he was incapable in his dealings with the Vikings⁵; and thirdly, that he was inactive and immobile, a do-nothing king.⁶ What evidence is there for these claims? In this chapter I will argue that each of these three main criticisms is drawn almost exclusively from a single source, the Mainz continuation of the so-called *Annales Fuldenses*; and, moreover, that this source must be read with much more scepticism than has generally been allowed by previous commentators.

¹ Tellenbach, 'Nobility', p.209; Schieffer, 'Karl', p.134.

² Stubbs, *Germany*, p.65; Fried, *Weg*, p.423.

³ Cf., for instance, Dunbabin, *France*, p.15; Riché, *Carolingians*, p.217; Schieffer, 'Karl', p.134.

⁴ Eg. Keller, 'Sturz', p.338.

⁵ Eg. Wormald, 'Studies', p.140.

⁶ Eg. Bowlus, *Franks*, p.209.

The continuing uniformity of opinion is in large part simply a result of the fact that Charles the Fat has been much less studied than most other Carolingian kings: the lack of new research arguing the contrary case means that historians tend to simply accept and repeat the prevailing historiographical opinion. It is also, however, testimony to the influence which convenient historical paradigms can persistently exert over scholars generations after they were first conceived. The purpose of this chapter is therefore not simply to rehabilitate the historical reputation of Charles the Fat, although that will emerge as one aspect of my argument. As outlined in chapter 1, there is also a broader issue at stake. The judgement of Charles as a failure rests in part on a teleological assumption: the fact that his reign ended in his own deposition and the collapse of the Carolingian empire is taken to demonstrate that he was a weak king. This in turn feeds into and supports the longstanding historiographical models which underpin the conventional negative interpretation of the late Carolingian Empire as a whole: most notably, that the aristocracy ‘rose’, that France and Germany ‘emerged’, and that murderous conflict within the royal house escalated. The existence of these processes is easier to assert if it is assumed that Charles the Fat, the man who was ultimately their victim, was personally weak, and thus powerless to resist the inevitable tide of history: his reign was the acid test, its ‘failure’ the final proof of Carolingian decline. Each of these ‘trends’ will be addressed in subsequent chapters, where it is argued that they rest more on teleological assumptions than on firm contemporary evidence.⁷ By first critiquing the received view of Charles’s personal weakness, therefore, I hope to remove one of the blocks on which the conventional understanding of the collapse of the Carolingian Empire rests, and to begin to assess the evidence in its short-term, contemporary, context, rather than as part of the traditional grand narrative of early medieval historiography.

2.2: The *Annales Fuldenses*

The text known to historians as the *Annales Fuldenses* is our principal source for east Frankish history in the second half of the ninth century, and as such

⁷ See below, chapters 3 (family conflict), 4 (aristocracy), 5 (nations).

necessarily provides the framework for all discussions of east Frankish politics in the period. Although the textual history of the *Annales* remains shrouded in doubt, we can say for certain that it is independent of other known sources from the 830s onwards, and that from about the mid-860s the version we have was being written up contemporaneously in the circle of Archbishop Liutbert of Mainz (863-89).⁸ The manuscripts diverge in 882: the version in MS 2 which went on until the year 887 was a direct continuation of the Mainz annals, likewise produced under the supervision of Liutbert; while that in the manuscripts of group 3, which extends to 901, provides an alternative perspective clearly written from a Bavarian viewpoint.⁹ Both continuations appear to have been written more or less contemporaneously.¹⁰

Liutbert was archchaplain and archchancellor at the court of Louis the German from 870 until 876, and retained his position under Louis the Younger (876-82), in whose kingdom Mainz lay. Accordingly, the text up until 882 is partisan to those rulers, vilifying or suppressing mention of their main rivals (including, in the case of Louis the Younger, Charles the Fat) while promoting their own aspirations.¹¹ However, the work was not strictly speaking a 'court' or 'official' record; rather, it reflected the viewpoint of the archbishop himself. In its consistent opposition to the divorce plans of Lothar II in the 860s, for example, it sometimes diverged from the attitude of Louis the German, which fluctuated in accordance with that king's attempts to position himself to achieve maximum political benefit.¹²

This is an important point to bear in mind when considering the annals composed by the Mainz continuator in 882-7. On the death of Louis the Younger

⁸ Reuter, *Annals*, pp.1-14 is the best guide to the detailed debates concerning the AF's origins and authorship.

⁹ To distinguish these texts I will employ the following abbreviations throughout this thesis: AF refers to the text before the manuscripts diverge in 882; AFC (*Annales Fuldenses* continuation) denotes the Mainz continuation; and BC is used for the Bavarian continuation. I assume, for convenience and on the basis of probability, that the authors were male.

¹⁰ This will be assumed except where indicated.

¹¹ An example is provided by Charles the Fat's involvement in the politics of the succession to Louis II (AB s.a.871, p.183; 874, pp.196-7; 875, p.198; Andreas, *Historia*, p.230) which is completely ignored by the *Annales Fuldenses*.

¹² Carroll, 'Archbishops', pp.5-6. Nelson, 'Annals', shows that similar conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between Hincmar of Rheims and Charles the Bald from the former's

in January 882, his brother Charles the Fat inherited his Franconian-Bavarian kingdom and, because he already had an archchancellor in Bishop Liutward of Vercelli, Liutbert lost the high position at court which he had enjoyed for so long. We know that Liutbert was extremely unhappy at this development and was reluctant to accept his demotion: a charter drafted in November 882 in the monastery of Weißenburg, where he was abbot, insisted on referring to him as ‘archicapellanus’, an epithet which belonged to Liutward under the new regime.¹³ This bitterness heavily informs the standpoint of the Mainz annalist in all his reports between 882 and mid-887, which are consistently and pointedly hostile towards both Liutward and Charles.

The Bavarian continuator, on the other hand, displays all the traits one would expect from a medieval provincial chronicler. His annals concentrate on Bavarian matters, and he has no obvious axe to grind either way in his reports about goings-on at court: this text is no more a court history along the lines of the *Annales Regni Francorum* than is its Mainz counterpart. Indeed, Charles the Fat himself tends to vanish from sight when he is not in Bavaria or nearby in the east Frankish kingdom. The viewpoints of both sources change in the middle of 887, at which point the emperor deposed Liutward and replaced him with Liutbert.¹⁴ As a result, the Mainz annalist is for the short remainder of his work sympathetic to Charles (although not, of course, to the disgraced Liutward), while the Bavarian continuator suddenly becomes *parti pris* and turns hostile to justify (retrospectively) the coup of Arnulf of Carinthia.¹⁵

Although all these circumstances are well enough known to historians, they are in fact rarely incorporated into accounts of the period. Despite the fact that the Mainz continuator's version is, for the bulk of the reign, clearly the more driven by a specific political agenda (opposition to Liutbert's exclusion from court), it has been generally accepted by scholars as the more reliable source, and even as an objective record of events. Historians frequently interpret the Mainz annalist as reflecting a general contemporary disquiet with Charles's reign, while

Annales Bertiniani; cf. eadem, ‘History-writing’. On Louis the German, Charles the Bald and Lothar's divorce, see now Airlie, ‘Bodies’.

¹³ D CIII 63.

¹⁴ On which see c.6.6.

adjudging the less critical Bavarian continuator to be an apologist for the emperor.¹⁶ Another common approach, as used in two standard textbook accounts of the reign, is to follow the hostile Mainz author until the deposition of Liutward in mid-887, and then to switch to the Bavarian annalist's justification of Arnulf's coup, in which the extent and nature of the opposition to Charles is exaggerated for polemical reasons.¹⁷ Evidence from different sources is therefore juxtaposed without discussion or even acknowledgement of the different agendas of the authors. Similarly, Fried, in the most recent authoritative treatment of the period, follows the critical section of the Mainz annals religiously, taking it as evidence for general disquiet with Charles and neglecting totally to acknowledge the existence of alternative versions of events (from the Bavarian annalist as well as from Abbo of St-Germain-des-Prés, Regino of Prüm and Notker the Stammerer).¹⁸

In other words, the sources are usually read selectively to fit the established interpretation of the reign, rather than the received narrative being assessed in light of the sources. Inconvenient differences in contemporary opinion are thus suppressed in order to provide an evidential basis for the conventional paradigm of a decline in royal power in the late ninth century.¹⁹ It is a principal contention of this thesis that by taking all the sources from the reign together and reading them in their contemporary context, one can draw a quite different picture. As a prelude to this endeavour, therefore, the rest of this chapter is an attempt to remove the Mainz continuation of the *Annales Fuldenses* from the privileged position it enjoys in the eyes of historians of the period, hence putting it back in its place as simply one source among many, and to show that it does not always deserve to be prioritised over the account of the Bavarian annalist. An examination of the rhetorical strategies of the Mainz annalist in relation to some of

¹⁵ Bowlus, 'Early History', p.557 is a good exposition of the change in tone of both authors.

¹⁶ Keller, 'Sturz', after acknowledging the respective positions of the annalists, ultimately follows the Mainz author. Collins, *Europe*, p.288 asserts that the Mainz text was written by a partisan of Charles the Fat. Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', p.112 describes it as 'official'. Wallace-Hadrill, *Church*, p.330, characterises the Mainz annals as unpolitical. These authors imply that even Charles's allies lamented his alleged incompetence.

¹⁷ McKitterick, *Kingdoms*, p.262; Riché, *Carolingians*, pp.117-9. Neither author mentions the existence of the Bavarian continuation.

¹⁸ Fried, 'Kingdoms', pp.158-60. See below, cc. 4.2.2 (Abbo), 6.1 (Regino), 7 (Notker).

his major set-pieces will reveal that his work's polemic is much more pointed and carefully constructed than has been hitherto appreciated, and that it is the central source for the negative image of Charles in the modern historiography.²⁰

2.2.1: Charles and Liutward

This image has, as mentioned above, three main parts. Firstly, was Charles dominated by his advisers? There are only two pieces of evidence for this. One is that Liutward was mentioned more than any other individual as intervenor in the texts of royal charters. Certainly, this shows us that he was exceptionally influential at court, but this is no more than we would expect from a man who was both archchaplain and archchancellor, the two most prominent court positions.²¹ It only acquires the sinister quality of domination when considered in the light of the long set piece on Liutward by the Mainz annalist in his entry for 887, on the occasion of the archchancellor's deposition.²² This invective includes a number of charges: low birth, heresy, attacking the king's relative Berengar of Friuli, and usurpation of royal rights. Liutward, we are told, surpassed even the Old Testament villain Haman because he was 'prior imperatori et plus quam imperator ab omnibus honorabatur et timebatur.' In addition, he was depicted as the emperor's only counsellor.²³ Almost all these accusations are unique to this source:²⁴ the fact that bitterness towards Liutward was one of its *raisons d'être* should immediately arouse our suspicion. In any case, the claims are mostly demonstrably false. Liutward was not of low birth, but belonged to a significant Alemannic family associated with the royal monastery of Reichenau which had enjoyed *Königsnähe* at least since Charles the Fat's installation in the region in the late 850s.²⁵ Nor was he a heretic: in fact the Christological deviation of which he

¹⁹ The key text is the Bavarian continuator's tendentious 887 annal, which justifies Arnulf's coup by speaking of a realm-wide conspiracy against Charles the Fat: see below, cc.6.1 and 6.7 for further discussion.

²⁰ That the text was polemical is acknowledged by Reuter, 'Plunder', p.75.

²¹ The intervention evidence is discussed fully below, c.6.6.2.

²² AFC s.a.887, pp.105-6.

²³ This is implicit in the 887 annal, and explicit in AFC s.a.882, p.98.

²⁴ The allegation that Liutward was Charles's 'unique counsellor' is the exception, having been made also by Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.127. However, Regino also had an axe to grind with Liutward, and this stock accusation was an obvious way of expressing it: see below, c.6.6.2.

²⁵ Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, pp.190-1.

is accused (belief in Christ as one in unity of substance with God, but not in person) is garbled, and corresponds to no known early medieval theology, orthodox or otherwise. Likewise, despite his high position, he was far from being the emperor's only counsellor, and we can identify many more such men.²⁶ The feud with Berengar was based on the allegation that Liutward had kidnapped the *marchio*'s niece from the major imperial nunnery of St-Salvatore in Brescia in order to marry her off to one of his relatives. However, this version of events may well be an invention of the Mainz annalist: it is quite likely that Liutward here acted not in spite of imperial authority, but rather with Charles's permission and even with the acquiescence of the nuns. Berengar, and not Liutward, was the aggressor.²⁷

This last complaint is adduced by the Mainz author as the evidence for his assertion that Liutward was the real power behind the throne: if he could dictate noble marriages to further his own interests, and do so at the expense of a relative of the emperor and of an important imperial nunnery, by implication there was nothing he could not do. The fact that the annalist distorts the course of the feud in order to make this polemical accusation should alert us to the fact that his narrative is politically charged.

This becomes even clearer when it is recognised that all the attacks on Liutward are couched in heavily stereotyped terms, stock themes drawn from Carolingian history and biblical models. Each stereotype, however, achieves its specific impact only in the context of the dispute between Liutward and Liutbert. Low birth was a standard criticism (equated as it was with moral poverty), used most famously as the most potent accusation of which Thegan could think to belittle Ebo of Rheims in his *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris*.²⁸ As a heretic, moreover, Liutward was unfit to lead the royal chapel as archchaplain: the allegation was carefully chosen to imply that he was unfit to do his job (which Liutbert coveted).²⁹ The 'unique counsellor' was a classic Carolingian

²⁶ Several of whom are discussed in cc.4, 5 and 6.6.2.

²⁷ This is the impression given by BC s.a.886, p.114 and s.a.887, p.115, whose author had no vested interest in the matter. See also Schmid, 'Liutbert', pp.42-8.

²⁸ Thegan, *Gesta*, c.44, p.232.

²⁹ Bührer-Thierry, 'Conseiller', pp.118-9. The same message comes from AFC s.a.882, p.98, where Liutward is referred to as 'pseudoepiscopus'.

demonisation applied to kings' favourites by their enemies.³⁰ It was a notion which inverted the norms of Carolingian political culture, the rhetoric (if not always the reality) of which was based on ideas of broad discussion and consensus, ideas supported by biblical precedent.³¹ In Liutward's case, he was given to influence the emperor 'caeteris consiliariis, qui patri imperatoris assistere solebant, ignorantibus.'³² This last comment we may read as a direct reference to Liutbert and his circle: if Liutward was the antithesis of consensus, the archbishop and his associates were its personification. Finally, as Bühner-Thierry has stressed, there are significant affinities between the Mainz annalist's characterisation of Liutward and the book of Esther. The annalist makes an explicit reference to this text when he states that Liutward 'Aman, cuius mentio facta est in libro Hester, et nomine et dignitate praeccelleret. Ille enim post regem Assuerum erat secundus, iste vero prior imperatori et plus quam imperator ab omnibus honorabatur et timebatur.' To the educated ninth-century reader or listener, the parallels would have been striking: Haman was not only his king's second-in-command, he also carried his seal ring, a possible reference to Liutward's position as archchancellor. Haman, moreover, ultimately overreached his position and was replaced, with God's help, by his arch-enemy Mordechai.³³ If Liutward was Haman, then Liutbert, of course, was Mordechai.

All this demonstrates that, far from being a reliable description of the relationship between Liutward of Vercelli and Charles the Fat, the Mainz annal for 887 is an extremely pointed and polemical piece of writing. It deploys standard and well-known themes to show how Liutward, as opposed to Liutbert, was unfit to be archchaplain and archchancellor on a number of carefully chosen grounds: it is a portrait of an archetypally bad adviser tailored to fit contemporary conventions, and not, as historians have read it, a dispassionate history of his career. It is, in short, a collage of stereotypes. It is important to stress, moreover, that the context within which all its accusations acquire meaning is the rivalry between Liutward and the annalist's patron, Liutbert of Mainz: this is at the centre

³⁰ Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', pp.119-21.

³¹ On consensus see Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire'.

³² AFC s.a.882, p.98.

³³ Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', pp.116-7.

of each of its claims and allusions. The fact that this political rivalry so clearly informs the Mainz annalist's depiction of Liutward therefore seriously undermines its value as evidence for the archchancellor's domination of the emperor.

2.2.2: The siege of Asselt

The same rhetorical device, the setting up of archetypes, is employed by the Mainz annalist in his discussion of Charles's dealings with the Vikings, which constitute the second major element of the emperor's negative reputation. In this case, although other texts discussing the subject are available, it is the Mainz continuator's depiction of the siege of Asselt in 882 which dominates historians' accounts and colours their representation of the other sources.³⁴ The full text is worth reproducing here, broken up into sections to make the subsequent argument easier to follow:

1. 'Statuto itaque et condito inter eos tempore convenerunt de diversis provinciis viri innumerabiles et omnibus hostibus formidandi, si ducem habuissent idoneum sibi que consentientem, hoc est Franci, Norici, Alamanni, Thuringii atque Saxones; parique intentione profecti sunt contra Nordmannos pugnare cupientes. Quo cum pervenissent, munitionem illorum, quae vocatur Ascloha, obsederunt.

2. Cumque iam expugnanda esset munitio et hi, qui intus erant, timore percussi mortem se evadere posse desperassent,

3. quidam ex consiliariis augusti nomine Liutwartus pseudoepiscopus caeteris consiliariis, qui patri imperatoris assistere solebant, ignorantibus iuncto sibi Wigberto comite fraudulentissimo imperatorem adiit et ab expugnatione hostium pecunia corruptus deduxit, atque Gotafridum ducem illorum imperatori praesentavit;

4. quem imperator more Achabico quasi amicum suscepit et cum eo pacem fecit, datis ex utraque parte obsidibus.

5. Quod Nordmanni acceperunt pro omine; et ut pax et illorum parte rata non dubitaretur, clipeum iuxta morem suum in sublime suspenderunt et portas munitionis aperuerunt. Nostrates autem calliditatis illorum expertes eandem

³⁴ Fried, 'Kingdoms', p.159 is typical in giving priority to the Mainz account of this encounter to the exclusion of any mention of the quite neutral Bavarian annalist.

munitionem ingressi sunt, alii quidem causa negotiandi, alii vero pro loci firmitate considerata. At Nordmanni ad consuetam calliditatem conversi clipeum pacis deponunt, portas claudunt et omnis ex nostris intus inventos aut occiderunt aut catenis ferreis ligatos ad redimendum servaverunt.

6. Sed imperator tantam contumeliam exercitui suo illatam flocci pendens praedictum Gotafridum de fonte baptismatis levavit et, quem maximum inimicum et desertorem regni sui habuerat, consortem regni constituit. Nam comitatus et beneficia, quae Rorich Nordmannus Francorum regibus fidelis in Kinnin tenuerat, eidem hosti suisque hominibus ad inhabitandum delegavit;

7. et quod maioris est criminis, a quo obsides accipere et tributa exigere debuit, huic pravorum usus consilio contra consuetudinem parentum suorum, regum videlicet Francorum, tributa solvere non erubuit. Nam thesauros aecclesiarum, qui propter metum hostium absconditi fuerant, abstulit et auri purissimi atque argenti ad confusionem sui totiusque exercitus, qui illum sequebatur, libras 2,412 eisdem dedit inimicis.

8. Praeterea, quisquis de suo exercitu in defensione sanctae aecclesiae zelo Dei commotus aliquem de Nordmannis, qui castra invadere temptabant, occidit, aut eum iugulare aut ei oculos eruere praecepit.

9. Unde exercitus valde contristatus dolebat super se talem venisse principem, qui hostibus favit et eis victoriam de hostibus subtrahit;

10. nimiumque confusi redierunt in sua.

11. Nordmanni vero de thesauris et numero captivorum 200 naves onustas miserunt in patriam; ipsi in loco tuto se continent, iterum tempus opportunum praedandi opperientes.³⁵

The annalist's literary strategy here is more subtle than it appears at first sight. His criticism of Charles is not simply the one commonly levelled against kings by the ecclesiastical authors of the ninth century, that the outcome of the siege was disastrous because there was no outright military victory and tribute had to be paid. His objection is much more pointed than that: it is that this is exactly the opposite of what Charles should have done.

³⁵ AFC, s.a.882, pp.98-9.

Indeed, the whole report of the siege is carefully constructed as a series of norms and oppositions. This is clear from a comparison of sections 1 and 2. The Frankish army is described as ‘omnibus hostibus formidandi, si ducem habuissent idoneum sibi que consentientem... parique intentione profecti sunt contra Nordmannos pugnare cupientes.’ Heavy stress is laid, therefore, on the size, capacity to inspire fear, and eagerness of the army. However, the deal for peace made by the emperor ‘cumque iam expugnanda esset munitio et hi, qui intus erant, timore percussi mortem se evadere posse desperassent.’ Peace was agreed, in other words, just as the army was poised to fulfil its function: it should be feared, and it was; it wanted to fight, and it was guaranteed of victory. Inspiring fear, a willingness to fight and performing as a good leader are here presented as criteria for judging royal behaviour: the norms are established in section 1, then shown unfulfilled in section 2. The outcome (section 9) was the regret of the army and their dissatisfaction with Charles, who was personally to blame for snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.³⁶

The same device is evident in the descriptions of the terms of the treaty struck by Charles with the Vikings. In sponsoring the baptism of their leader Godafrid (section 6), he made a man who had been the kingdom’s ‘maximus inimicus’ into the ‘consors regni’, a term normally only applied to members of the royal family. Godafrid was raised from one extreme to the other. Moreover (section 7), Charles paid tribute and gave hostages to a man from whom he ought to have taken them: this was done against Frankish royal tradition. The tribute he paid to Godafrid was church treasure which had previously been hidden to prevent exactly this eventuality. Charles’s behaviour was not simply wrong: it was both un-kingly and un-Frankish.³⁷

If his actions therefore inverted those which were normally expected of a Frankish king, the Mainz annalist also made it clear that they were a direct breach of the will of God. In section 4 Charles is compared to Ahab, the Old Testament ruler who had made peace against the manifest wishes of God.³⁸ In section 8 it is

³⁶ The inspiration of fear as a kingly quality was also stressed by Notker, *Gesta*, 1.5, p.8; 1.18, p.25; 2.15, pp.79-80; 2.17, p.84.

³⁷ See also Reuter, ‘Plunder’, p.75.

³⁸ 3 Kings 20-22.

reported how he then went further, ordering his men not to kill any Northmen on fear of death, even though they might be ‘in defensione sanctae aecclesiae zelo Dei commotus.’

Ahab was also, however, a king deceived by false prophets, and the Mainz annalist is not slow to identify to whom he was referring at the siege of Asselt. Section 3 relates how the deal for peace was brokered by ‘Liutwartus pseudoepiscopus caeteris consiliariis, qui patri imperatoris assistere solebant, ignorantibus’. This is another oppositional passage, and one which provides the key for understanding the account as a whole. Liutward, acting only with the consent of the ‘comes fraudulentissimus’ Wigbert, is contrasted to the multiple counsellors who ought to have been consulted; as noted above, this was contrary to the principles propounded by the idealised rhetoric of Carolingian consensus. He is also, however, set off against the former counsellors of Louis the German: in other words, Liutbert of Mainz and his associates. Everything that took place at Asselt was exactly as it should not be, but this was the most important. The implication is that if Liutward had not been in a position to act as a false prophet to Charles the Fat, and the emperor had had Liutbert at his side instead, the outcome would have been much different. Once again, the specific political gripe of the Mainz annals can be located right at the heart of one of its major set pieces.

The Mainz annalist’s version of the siege of Asselt is therefore built around a number of carefully chosen themes of normal and appropriate behaviour, which constitute a pointed attack on the emperor for doing just what he ought not to have done. Like an anti-king, against the will of his army and of God, he allowed defeat when victory was all but achieved and reached a peace which broke all the norms which should govern the actions of a Frankish king. It was quite normal for Carolingian authors to stereotype and stylise the behaviour their enemies, especially the Vikings.³⁹ The Mainz author, however, applies this technique to the actions of Charles the Fat and Liutward of Vercelli in 882 as well,

³⁹ See, for instance, Coupland, ‘Rod’. The 882 Mainz annal also makes archetypes of the Northmen. Section 5 reads like a microcosm of the historiographical debate about whether the Vikings were traders or raiders: they do exactly the opposite of what they seem to be doing when they drop their trading flag and slaughter the Franks. The annalist’s use of the terms ‘ad consuetam calliditatem’ and ‘iuxta morem suum’ reveals that he has clear and categorical notions as to what constitutes normal Viking behaviour (this is essentially reduced to a desire for plunder).

presenting us with a looking-glass world in which everything is out of place and nothing is as it ought to be. This is explicit in his conclusion: the army, forced to return home without a victory, did so ‘nimium confusi [in the sense of ‘confused’]’.⁴⁰

The political agenda of this account is therefore amplified by the pointed rhetorical strategies its author uses; it is more an ideological commentary on kingship than reportage. It is hence suspect as a priority source for the actual course of events at Asselt, and even more so as a passive barometer of contemporary opinion. A useful corrective is, however, available in the shape of the Bavarian annalist’s report. This text, which, as noted above, is usually dismissed by historians as a pro-Charles polemic, in fact shows every sign of being a *more* objective version of events than that of the Mainz author. The Bavarian account, which is approximately the same length as that of its Mainz counterpart, begins with a detailed description of the army’s advance up the Rhine, split into two contingents.⁴¹ Treachery foiled an attempt at a surprise attack, necessitating a siege. The account of the siege takes up the bulk of the report, before a brief summary of the terms of the peace treaty.

Several points must be stressed about this source. Its information on the arrangement of the army and the siege is detailed and convincing. The division of the army into two contingents either side of the Rhine is consistent with what is known about other Carolingian campaigns which often moved in a pincer movement (and along river banks) towards their goals. Arnulf and Henry are depicted as leading the Bavarian and Frankish contingents in the advance party. Not only were these leaders appropriate to armies from these *regna*, but the sending ahead of an advance party under Henry was a tactic used by Charles on at least one other occasion.⁴² There is also a wealth of incidental detail about the siege included in the report. Precise dates, times of day, lengths of time and distances pepper the text, and we are given a vivid description of the unpleasant

⁴⁰ For another example of the polemical accusation of ‘un-Frankish’ behaviour, see AF s.a.876, p.86, which ridicules Charles the Bald’s imperial stylings: ‘Omnem enim consuetudinem regum Francorum contemnens Grecas glorias optimas arbitrabatur.’ The polemical nature of this passage is usually recognised by historians, in contrast to the report of the siege of Asselt.

⁴¹ Citations will be from BC s.a.882, pp.107-9.

physical conditions of the siege and of the weather. Moreover, no fewer than four Viking leaders are identified by name.

This detail serves no obvious purpose within the logic of the text: it is not, for instance, in any way marshalled to provide a coherent apologia for the emperor or for the inconclusive outcome of the conflict. The account is also anomalous within the Bavarian continuation as a whole: most Viking raids, including all those of 883-5, went completely unmentioned by the author, and even the siege of Paris in 885-6 roused him to barely more than passing comment.⁴³ It is quite possible, therefore, either that the author of this work was present at the siege of Asselt, or that he had access to an eyewitness report. In light of this suggestion it is worth noting the frequent use of the first person plural in the text, such as 'nostri' (our men), 'datis ex nostra parte obsidibus' (hostages having been given by us), 'remissis nostris obsidibus' (our hostages having been sent back); and, moreover, that the annals only continue properly 'redeuntibus Baiowariis domum' (after the Bavarians had returned home).

The incidental detail of the Bavarian account is even more striking when compared with the dearth of similar material in the Mainz version which, despite its length, moves directly from the gathering of the army to the circumstances and terms of the peace treaty, the events which had the most importance for its author's polemical purpose. In other words, it is the Bavarian continuator who appears to be by far the more reliable witness to the actual events of the 882 siege.

With this in mind, two main conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, some central elements of the Mainz account can be regarded as highly suspect. The accusation of treachery which is levelled against Liutward by the Mainz author looks unlikely. The Bavarian annalist blames treachery for the failure of the surprise attack, not for a premature decision on the emperor's part to come to terms with the enemy. Moreover, he is clear that the fault lay in the advance party, 'ex parte Francorum': Liutward was not a Frank but an Aleman with an Italian bishopric, and in any case, as archchancellor, would presumably have been

⁴² AV s.a.886, p.61; AFC s.a.886, p.105. Cf. Louis the Younger's use of Henry in this capacity against Boso in AV s.a.880, p.47.

with Charles in the main body of the army. The Bavarian annalist (or his source) must have known what he was talking about, since the Bavarian contingent had been together with the Frankish 'proditores' in the advance party.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Mainz author's assertion that the terms of the peace deal were contrary to Frankish custom is demonstrably false: the policy of paying off invaders and setting them to defend lands at river mouths was by no means a new or untested measure.⁴⁵

Secondly, the tone of the Bavarian account is instructive. It is by no means particularly pro-Charles: his initial attack is a failure, and the ensuing siege is long, nasty and inconclusive. However, it is significant that the annalist does not particularly criticise the emperor for this. The coming to terms is attributed primarily to the illness spreading through both camps as a result of the summer heat and the number of corpses lying around unburied. Moreover, the annalist's sigh of relief is almost audible when he ends his account with the report that Charles 'cuncto exercitui amabilem licentiam redeundi concessit.' The generally neutral attitude of the Bavarian continuator is largely shared by other contemporary sources. The annalist of St-Vaast, ever-interested in the doings of the Northmen, enumerated their depredations before concluding with palpable satisfaction that Charles 'Nortmannos e suo regno abire fecit'.⁴⁶ Hincmar and Regino, our other sources, offer more negative readings, but nevertheless nothing beyond the usual inclination of ecclesiastical authors to berate kings who used church resources to buy off their enemies and to read the attacks of the Vikings as manifestations of God's disapproval.⁴⁷ Indeed, it is instructive that the author closest to the siege itself, the Bavarian continuator, is also the most sympathetic to the emperor. It is no coincidence that exactly the same phenomenon is discernible in the accounts of the siege of Paris, where the only eyewitness report, that of Abbo of St-Germain-des-Prés, is also the sole text to actually praise the actions of

⁴³ BC s.a.886, p.114. Cf. AFC s.a.883-5, pp.100-3. Some of these raids were in Saxony, but the Bavarian continuator was certainly aware of events in that region: eg. BC s.a.882, p.109; 883, p.110.

⁴⁴ This is probably why he recorded the names of the leaders of only these two groups.

⁴⁵ See now Coupland, 'Poachers'; idem, 'Vikings', p.198 shows that tribute was often an effective solution. Nor were the Mainz annals necessarily always hostile to such measures: cf. AF s.a.850, pp.39-40; 873, pp.80-1.

⁴⁶ AV s.a.882, pp.51-2.

⁴⁷ AB s.a.882, pp.248-9; Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.882, p.119. On ecclesiastical attitudes see Coupland, 'Rod'.

the emperor.⁴⁸ It is quite probably the case that only writers more distant from events, as Hincmar and Regino were in 882, were detached enough to manipulate them in order to make points of personal import to them; such as (in Hincmar's case) the condemnation of royal use of ecclesiastical lands and (in Regino's) the interpretation of Viking attacks as evidence for God's displeasure at the sins of the Franks.

In the context of these sources, the polemic of the Mainz annalist stands alone at one extreme of the spectrum of opinion. Its account of the siege of Asselt is anomalous, not representative. Historians have been wrong, therefore, to take the Mainz text as the key source for the events of 882 and to conclude, as did Pierre Riché, that the ending of the siege was 'to the disappointment of all':⁴⁹ its extreme polemic is to be explained by its political agenda concerning Charles's exclusion of Liutbert from court. This type of misrepresentation (or at least exaggeration) is common enough in Carolingian historical writing. Hincmar's depiction of Louis III's celebrated victory over the Vikings at Saucourt in 881 as a defeat, for instance, was motivated by the archbishop's dissatisfaction at being left out of high position at the young king's court.⁵⁰ In this sense it is a very similar text to the Mainz version of the siege of Asselt. However, while historians rightly take Hincmar's view of Saucourt with more than a pinch of salt, they accept wholesale the Mainz continuator's view of Asselt. The idea of Charles the Fat as a king peculiarly unable in his dealings with Vikings is largely drawn from this text: once the text is read in its context, this idea loses its main source and Charles appears no better or worse than any other king in the way contemporaries perceived his attempts to deal with the invaders.

2.2.3: Activity and inactivity

The third element of Charles the Fat's reputation as a failed king is that he was immobile and inactive, a *roi fainéant*. For this idea, too, historians have drawn almost exclusively on the Mainz continuator of the *Annales Fuldenses*.

⁴⁸ See below, c.4.2.2.

⁴⁹ Riché, *Carolingians*, p.217; Coupland, 'Poachers', p.109.

One subtle but telling way in which the author attempts to induce his audience to draw this conclusion is by his sparse reporting of the emperor's itinerary on major liturgical feast days. In the five full years of his reign when he is the sole royal subject of the annals, the Mainz author reports Charles's whereabouts only twice: the Purification of the Virgin in 884 and Christmas in 885. By contrast, the Bavarian continuation gives us Christmas of 882, 884 and 885, Easter in 883, 886 and 887, and epiphany in 885. Similarly, in the Mainz annals between 870 and 881 we are told the location of Louis the German and then Louis the Younger on no less than 20 major festivals. In particular, from 872, with only one exception (876, the year in which Louis's three sons succeeded him), all the reported royal itineraries contain references to Christmas or Easter, or both. The Mainz continuator is therefore anomalous. This pattern is no accident. The mentioning of the king's whereabouts on feast days was not a simple matter of generic convention: as the Carolingians saw it, it was part of the grand narrative of medieval Christian historiography. The Carolingian king was thought of (at least by himself and his friends) as *vicarius dei*, the representative of God on earth. His progress round the kingdom was intrinsically linked to the circular progress of the liturgical year and the ceremonies associated with it in both literature and reality. His presence at major churches on major festivals was a reflection of the relationship between God and the legitimate ruler. The omission of this information by the Mainz continuator, which has the effect of producing an image of an inactive ruler, is glaring.

In addition to this, the text juxtaposes Charles's inactivity with the vigour of its own heroes, whom it portrays also in a stereotyped way carrying out functions which should have been the king's. A report in the annal for 883 is instructive here: 'Nordmanni per alveum Rheni fluminis ascendentes plurima loca nuper restaurata succenderunt, preadam inde capientes non modicam. Quibus Liutbertus Mogontiensis archiepiscopus cum paucis occurrit; sed non paucos ex eis prostravit et praedam excussit. Agripina Colonia absque aeclesiis et

⁵⁰ AB s.a.881, pp.244-5; Cf. AV s.a.881, p.50; AF s.a.881, p.96; for comments see Fouracre, 'Context'. Nelson, 'Annals', pp.37-8 discusses how Hincmar's reports of kings' dealings with Vikings were conditioned by the state of his relationship with the ruler in question.



monasteriis reaedificata et muri eius cum portis et vectibus et seris instaurati.’⁵¹ This is a pallindromic entry: Liutbert has ‘paucis’, but he kills ‘non paucos’. He takes back the plunder seized by the raiders, and their work of destruction is undone by the rebuilding of Cologne. In other words, the actions of Liutbert negate those of the Vikings exactly. The subtext is that this is correct behaviour: in 882, by contrast, Charles the Fat did not negate the aims of the Northmen, but actually facilitated the realisation of their aims.

It is striking that throughout the Mainz continuation the same criteria of judgement are deployed by the author as had been used in the account of Asselt: inspiration of fear in the enemy, prevention of plunder, and evidence of God’s favour, everything that had marked Charles out as a failure in 882. Liutbert’s victory of 883, therefore, was measured partly by his success in retaking the attackers’ booty. In 884, two victories of the *dux* Henry over the Northmen, one achieved while Charles sat talking with his men at Colmar, were explicit evidence of God’s favour. Moreover, Henry’s success is specifically in preventing the enemy’s plundering (he kills them ‘ubicumque praedatum ire volebant’), and in creating fear in the minds of the Danes.⁵² The Vikings who had been harrying the kingdom of Carloman II overwintered in the Hesbaye in 884-5, ‘quasi nullo resistente’. Henry and Liutbert surprised them and showed them the error of their ways, killing some and, crucially, removing what they had foraged (plunder): again, the enemy was frightened and fled by night.⁵³ Godafrid was next to demonstrate a (in the Mainz author’s view) typically Viking lack of faith, attempting to move up the Rhine until stopped by Henry, with God’s help. After retreating they were beaten again by Saxons and Frisians, collectively and pointedly referred to as ‘christiani’, who also recovered their plunder with interest.⁵⁴ As a final example, the siege of Paris in 885-6 is also assessed on these criteria. The Vikings here were, quite properly, scared of the Frankish army until the death of its local leaders, Hugh the Abbot and Gauzlin of St-Denis, upon which they emerged and ‘venationes et varios ludos nullo prohibente

⁵¹ AFC s.a.883, p.100.

⁵² AFC s.a.884, pp.100-1.

⁵³ AFC s.a.885, p.102.

⁵⁴ AFC s.a.885, pp.102-3.

exercebant'.⁵⁵ Charles's failure (in the eyes of this annalist) at Paris is summed up in exactly these terms: after Henry was also killed, the emperor was actually scared himself, he endorsed plundering and he paid tribute.⁵⁶

The opposition between the inactivity of Charles and the vigour of other leaders (especially Henry and Liutbert himself) is thus a firmly established and consistent substratum in the Mainz text. Again, however, despite the dominance of this idea in the historiography, the Mainz author is an anomalous witness. The siege of Paris will be discussed more fully in a later chapter, but even a cursory reading of Abbo's *Bella Parisiaca Urbis* reveals a judgement of the emperor's actions which is diametrically opposed to the image given by the Mainz annals.⁵⁷ Moreover, in reality Charles's itinerary distinguishes him as one of the most mobile Carolingians of them all. Despite a short reign, he made six visits to Italy and two to the west Frankish kingdom, to say nothing of his journeys to the Rhineland, Lotharingia, Bavaria and the eastern marches. The evidence for this is principally his royal charters. It comes, therefore, as little surprise that Charles's unusual mobility has been recognised only by those historians who have worked on these charters.⁵⁸ For the majority of historians, who rely for their information on the Mainz annalist, he remains a lazy and inactive ruler.

2.3: Conclusion

In its consistent categorisation of the activities of the king and the magnates who populate its pages, the Mainz continuation of the *Annales Fuldenses* constitutes not a dispassionate description of events, but rather a political commentary on them. Its schematisation of political behaviour into distinct types reveals it, to some extent, as a dialogue between good and bad, right and wrong. The attributions of fear, treachery, divine favour and so on can be seen as literary motifs deployed to create particular images. For instance, plunder, taken or prevented, provided a ready-made and stable metaphor with which to define victory and judge the outcome of battles. The consistent use of these

⁵⁵ AFC s.a.886, p.104. Note the interesting equation made here between hunting and lordship ('omnique regione potiti...exercebant').

⁵⁶ AFC s.a.886, p.105.

⁵⁷ See below, c.4.2.2.

motifs, moreover, is especially conspicuous given that they rarely figure in earlier sections of the Mainz annals. Tribute and plunder, for example, are only intermittently associated with Viking objectives and defeats in the annals before 882.⁵⁹ Similarly, divine favour or wrath is only invoked twice in the annals between 840 and 882 in relation to Viking raids, of which approximately 17 are recorded.⁶⁰ The picture is very much the same with regard to the numerous reports of battles and campaigns against the Slavs, the enemies *par excellence* of the eastern Franks: on only four of these occasions had God's will been read into the outcome.⁶¹ It is quite otherwise with the Mainz continuation after 882 which, as described, frequently mobilises divine judgement as a gloss on the outcome of encounters with Vikings, negatively in the case of Charles, positively in the case of every other Frankish combatant. This is another very clear indication of the degree of care and artifice which went into the construction of the image of the emperor presented by the Mainz annalist.

The author does not purely invent- Charles the Fat did besiege the Vikings at Asselt, Liutbert of Mainz did defeat them after the sack of Cologne- but he does attempt to interpret those events on his audience's behalf according to his own agenda. Therefore, this work does not simply *tell* us that Charles the Fat was *rex inutilis*, as Einhard tells us of Childeric III: it *shows* us the effects of bad kingship in action. The author presented very clear criteria for assessing good kingship, and then showed Charles failing to fulfil each one in turn. His representation, in other words, was not of a 'bad king' per se, but of a ruler who had by definition failed in the practice of Frankish kingship. The account is systematic, an exposition of Charles as the archetypally failed king (in contrast to the vigorous activities of Henry and Liutbert). This text is a commentary on political ideas: we may describe it as almost a parody or caricature of kingship.⁶²

⁵⁸ Eg. Kehr, *Kanzlei*, pp.5-6.

⁵⁹ AF s.a.873, pp.80-1; 876, p.86 are exceptional. Cf. Nelson, '*Annals*', pp.37-8 on the inconsistency of even the highly-opinionated Hincmar on such matters as tribute in relation to his judgements on Charles the Bald.

⁶⁰ AF s.a.854, pp.44-5 (actually a Danish civil war); 873, pp.80-1 (a Frisian victory). Even Louis III's famous victory at Saucourt did not inspire a divine interpretation: AF s.a.881, p.96; similarly AV s.a.881, pp.50-1.

⁶¹ AF s.a.844, p.35; 870, p.70; 872, p.76; 880, pp.94-5.

⁶² On this subject in general see now Nelson, '*Bad Kingship*'.

Clearly, this has been the main source for historians' judgements on Charles the Fat's abilities: they have taken on board the tone of the Mainz author as well as the information he provides.⁶³ However, at every juncture of the continuation we encounter the antagonism between Liutward and Liutbert. Liutward is the archetypally bad archchancellor and he is culpable in the outcome of the siege of Asselt; while Liutbert vigorously fills the role against the Vikings which should have been Charles's responsibility. This agenda informs the whole text and motivates its criticisms. The text is best interpreted as a 'private history', a justificatory manifesto for the opposition of Liutbert of Mainz, his circle and his supporters to the regime of Charles the Fat, based as it was outside their sphere of influence.⁶⁴ It contained more than the frank critical opinion which kings might occasionally expect to hear from their close advisers;⁶⁵ it was surely meant only for the eyes of the archbishop and his entourage.

As comparison with other contemporary sources shows, however, the text is certainly not to be accepted wholesale. The fact that historians have usually been keen to do just that reveals the authority which the 'decline and fall' paradigm of Carolingian history still exerts over the historiography. The Mainz continuation and the conventional historiographical view of the late Carolingian empire are mutually reinforcing. The text's weak king, beset by Vikings and propped up by the vigour of the high aristocracy, fits perfectly with the modern belief in a dwindling of royal power in the years leading up to 888. Moreover, that very belief encourages its proponents to prioritise the Mainz annals as the key source for this process. Historians' eagerness to read late ninth-century chronicles such as this one as continuations of the tradition of 'official' Carolingian histories begun by the *Annales Regni Francorum* must also be questioned. The Mainz and Bavarian annals reflect the diffusion of historiography away from the court in the post-Charlemagne period, and the emergence of writers whose agendas were

⁶³ A clear parallel with Aethelred II of England, whose reign is traditionally assessed exclusively using the hostile *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, suggests itself. On Aethelred, see Keynes, 'Tale'.

⁶⁴ Innes and McKitterick, 'Writing', p.203 discuss polemic as a self-justifying genre.

⁶⁵ As Charles the Bald may have been intended to read or hear some of the critical sections of the *Annales Bertiniani*: Nelson, 'History-writing', pp.441-2.

personal, and could easily bring them into conflict with kings.⁶⁶ Once the 'officialness' and veracity of the Mainz text are called into question, the source-base for the traditional view of Charles's reign is seriously undermined. In short, the Mainz continuation is not a good enough source to prove either that Charles the Fat was a 'failed king', or that he ultimately fell victim to an inevitable decline in royal authority propelled by the invisible forces of some hypothetical 'historical process'. This is not to say that he was a 'great' ruler, but to judge him properly the slate must be wiped clean. To assess exactly what *was* happening in Charles's reign, all the sources, including the Mainz annals, must be considered in the light of each other, and it is to this analysis that the rest of this thesis is devoted.

⁶⁶ Arguments which help dissolve the distinction between 'private' monastic and 'official' dynastic history are offered by Althoff, 'Gandersheim'.

3: CAROLINGIAN FAMILY POLITICS AND THE REVOLT OF BOSO OF VIENNE, 879-884

3.1: The Carolingian family

The maintenance of good relationships within the royal family was one of the most crucial tasks which faced an early medieval ruler. The father-son relationship was arguably the most important dynamic of Carolingian politics from the very beginning, and success or failure in its management often determined the ultimate success or failure of a reign. The aspirations of kings' sons jostling for position in pursuit of the succession terms they desired could all too easily combine with the interests of one aristocratic constituency or another and ignite into open and dangerous rebellion, a situation to which, most famously, Louis the Pious fell victim.¹ The significance of the politics of the family was not lost on contemporary commentators, who identified the royal household as the figurative centre of the kingdom. As Sedulius Scottus put it in his handbook for kingship *Liber de rectoribus Christianis*: 'Rex pius et sapiens tribus modis regendi ministerium gerit. Nam primo se ipsum...; secundo uxorem propriam et liberos suosque domesticos; tertio populum sibi commissum rationali et glorioso moderamine regere debet.'²

The situation was, if anything, even more delicate after the division of the empire in 843. From this point sons who decided to rebel against their fathers could not only call on aristocratic support, but also had the potential of help from their uncles or cousins. Therefore Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat, apparently aggrieved that their father was favouring their older brother, got Charles the Bald to intervene on their behalf with Louis the German in 871; Charles, perhaps seeing an opportunity to gain some leverage over the east Frankish king, readily agreed.³ Of course, a lack of sons could be an equally serious threat. Much of the political controversy of the 860s focused on the attempts of Lothar II to have his marriage dissolved, in part so that his son Hugh could be recognised as heir, and the counter-attempts of his uncles Charles the Bald and Louis the German to foil his plans and render his kingdom vulnerable to

¹ On these issues see now Kasten, *Königssöhne*.

² Sedulius, *Liber*, c.5, col.300.

their ambitions.⁴ The politics of succession was thus complicated in the post-Verdun empire by the appearance of these new factors, adding what might be called a 'diplomatic' dimension to the situation.

The problems facing kings in the period 875-888 were more akin to those which troubled Lothar II than to those which threatened to engulf Louis the Pious. In the western kingdom, the descent line of Charles the Bald came to an abrupt halt in 884 with the death of his heirless grandson Carloman II.⁵ In the east, none of Louis the German's three sons had legitimate heirs who survived infancy, and Karlmann of Bavaria and Louis the Younger were in any case dead by 882. After Lothar II's kingdom was split between east and west Francia by the Treaty of Meerssen in 870, the death of his brother, the Emperor Louis II of Italy, in 875 marked the end of the direct Lotharingian line, for Louis was also without an heir. One effect of this proliferation of generational cul-de-sacs was that the numerous successions of this period had to be contested 'horizontally', between uncles, nephews and cousins, rather than between fathers and sons. A second was that a power vacuum opened up in the most affected *regna*, namely those of the middle Frankish realm, whose constituent aristocracies (those of Lotharingia, Provence and Italy) were accustomed to having kings of their own close at hand. These regions were no negligible prize for the Carolingians, who fought hard among themselves for control of them. Lotharingia in particular was a very significant *regnum* both geo-politically and symbolically as the site of many major royal churches, palaces and estates, including Aachen.

These tensions centering on the lingering uncertainty over the long-term future of the kingdoms of Lothar II and Louis II were brought to the boil by the events of the year 879. The death of the west Frankish king Louis II the Stammerer on 10 April sparked off a divisive scramble for power between two rival aristocratic factions fighting for control of the Stammerer's two young sons. One party pushed for the sole succession of the dead king's eldest son Louis III, while the other attempted to ensure a wider distribution of *Königsnähe* by

³ AB s.a.871, p.181; AF s.a.871, p.74.

⁴ On the divorce case, see now Airlie, 'Bodies'.

⁵ Charles the Simple was considered too young to become king at this stage, and indeed in 888: Flodoard, *Historia*, IV.5, p.563.

effecting a division of the kingdom between both Louis and his younger brother Carloman II. Ultimately the division party won the day by enlisting the military help of the seasoned east Frankish ruler Louis the Younger (876-82), but, inevitably, there was a price to pay. Louis's condition for retreat was the concession of the western half of Lotharingia, a demand to which the two young kings of west Francia were finally compelled to acquiesce in February 880 by the Treaty of Ribemont.⁶

By the time the dust thrown up by this long quarrel had settled, however, a new and unforeseen threat to stability had already emerged in the south of the kingdom. Boso, count of Vienne and in-law of the late emperors Louis II and Charles the Bald, took advantage of the power vacuum created by the disputed succession to Louis the Stammerer to have himself proclaimed king at a synod in Provence in October 879.⁷ His revolt thus arose out of a conjunction of some of the classic problems of late ninth-century succession politics: the aristocratic need for certainty about the identity of their future ruler, the 'horizontal' rivalry between heirless kings for each other's territories, and the disputed status of the middle kingdom. It is the argument of this chapter that the implications of these circumstances, which are typically seen by historians as disastrous for the dynasty, were in fact recognised and dealt with by the surviving Carolingians, who made plans for cooperation between them which was intended to guarantee the long-term future of the empire.

3.2: The significance of Boso

Ultimately Boso was to fail. As four royal armies swept down on his stronghold at Vienne in the late summer of 880, most of his supporters lost their nerve and defected to the Carolingians. The usurper held out for another two campaigning seasons but by 882 he was effectively beaten, and when he eventually died in early 887 it was as a fugitive in the hills of Provence. Nevertheless, the audacity of his very attempt was unprecedented and its

⁶ Werner, 'Gauzlin', passim.

⁷ *Conventus Mantalensis*. The most comprehensive accounts of Boso's career are Airlie, 'Behaviour', pp.195-304 and Poupardin, *Provence*, pp.41-141. See also Bautier, 'Origines'; Staab,

significance must be emphasised. Never before had a man from outside the ruling dynasty dared to ascend a throne during the period of the Carolingian monopoly of legitimate royal power, which endured from 751 until 888.⁸ His rising was therefore extraordinary, and amounted to a challenge to the exclusive right of the Carolingians to call themselves kings.⁹

Historians, observing this unhappy conjuncture of intra-familial conflict and extra-familial opposition which threatened to undermine the dominance of the Carolingian house around the years 879-80, have tended to interpret it as the beginning of the end for the dynasty. The period running from this point up to the deposition of Charles the Fat in November 887, during which a rapid succession of kings met usually premature, often bizarre and, most importantly, always heirless, deaths, is often viewed negatively and seen as a dimly lit endtime, a discrete coda to Carolingian political history proper. In order to explain the complicated political events of the period c.877-887, historians have resorted to models characterising them as chaotic and riven by bitter in-house rivalries.¹⁰ The new type of threat posed by Boso along with the deaths of the long-lived rulers Louis II of Italy, Louis the German and Charles the Bald, in whose wake it arose, are thus seen as emblematic of a terminal shattering of confidence in Carolingian rule. The final crisis of 887-8, the idea goes, was now inevitable.¹¹

This is an attractive thesis, and one which finds some vivid support in contemporary sources. Most notably, Notker the Stammerer's *Gesta Karoli*, ostensibly a collection of idealised anecdotes about its eponymous hero, also contains portentous musings on the imminent demise of the legitimate Carolingian

'Jugement'. Boso's monarchical claim was not expressed in territorial terms, but it is generally accepted that the west Frankish throne was his ultimate aim.

⁸ For the nature and significance of this monopoly see Airlie, '*Semper*'. Boso did lay heavy stress on his strong royal links (his father-in-law and brother-in-law had both been emperors), but the fact that he was not born a legitimate Carolingian was of paramount importance to contemporaries (especially his opponents), and marked him out as a 'tyrant'.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ McKitterick, *Kingdoms*, p.262; Halphen, *Charlemagne*, p.315; Auzias, *L'Aquitaine*, pp.409-20; Collins, 'Wifred', p.178; Fried, *Ludwig*, pp.17-8.

¹¹ As argued most recently by: Reuter, *Germany*, p.117 (stressing 876 as the turning point); Nelson, *Charles*, pp.258-63 (speaking of a decay of political structures after 877); Airlie, '*Semper*', p.139 (emphasising the significance of Boso). By the 'crisis' of 887-8 I refer not to the final extinguishing of the Carolingian line, which exercised intermittent control over some areas well into the tenth century, but, as noted, to the loss of its monopoly on royal legitimacy.

male line.¹² This work was, however, composed at a time (885-6) when the Carolingian family tree had been whittled away to its last legitimate scion, the heirless Charles the Fat, whose desperate and unrealistic schemes to sort out the succession were coming to seem increasingly futile to observers like Notker.¹³ If, on the other hand, we look a few years earlier for readings of the political atmosphere in the immediate aftermath of Boso's revolt, we can detect an altogether more positive attitude. Surveying the plentiful configuration of kings ruling the various parts of the empire in 881, Notker himself had been relatively optimistic: Louis III and Carloman II were, he concluded, 'spes Europae', while Charles the Fat was 'clementissimus Carolus magnum imperatorem at avum suum, Carolum, omni sapientia et industria et bellorum successibus coequans, tranquillitate vero pacis et rerum prosperitate superans'.¹⁴ Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims translated his own confidence into action, promoting a plan to have one of the two young west Frankish kings adopted by the heirless Charles the Fat, thus assuring both halves of the empire a long dynastic future.¹⁵ His hopes for the abilities of Carloman in particular inspired him in 882 to revise the didactic tract *De Ordine Palatii*, which was intended to guide the young king's government. At around the same time the anonymous author of the heroic poem the *Ludwigslied* affirmed that he saw in Carloman's brother Louis a king of great potential, clearly high in God's favour after his defeat of the Vikings at Saucourt in 881, and destined for a long reign; these sentiments were echoed, in 881, by the annalist of St-Vaast in Arras.¹⁶ The pessimism that tinged Notker's view of the Carolingians' future in 885-6 cannot therefore be backdated to the earlier 880s: to authors writing in 881-2, the dynasty was by no means a spent force. How can we account for this change in outlook among contemporary commentators? The answer, which requires a clarification and nuancing- if not an abandonment- of the accepted narrative of the last decade of Carolingian hegemony, lies in a consideration of the interaction between the four remaining kings (Louis III and

¹² Airlie, 'After Empire', p.159.

¹³ See c.7.5.

¹⁴ Notker, *Continuatio*, pp.329-30.

¹⁵ Flodoard, *Historia*, p.537.

¹⁶ AV s.a.881, pp.50-1.

Carloman II in the west, Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat in the east) as they faced up to the implications of Boson's rising in the year 880.

3.3: An overlooked Carolingian succession plan of 880

To begin exploring this interaction we must return to Lotharingia, the central Carolingian kingdom which had been split down the middle after the death of Lothar II in 869 without legitimate heir, and shared out between the kingdoms of east and west Francia.¹⁷ It was subsequently reunited when western Lotharingia was ceded to the east Frankish king Louis the Younger at Ribemont in February 880. The governance of this region was, as noted earlier, regarded as very significant, and accordingly the Carolingians appear to have made special provisions to control it. In the principal west Frankish chronicle of the period, the *Annales Bertiniani*, Hincmar of Rheims reported Louis's death in January 882 along with the following information: 'Venientes autem primores partis illius regni quae ipsi Hludouuico in locarium data fuerat, quatenus quae pater at avus illorum hebuerunt eis consentiret, voluerunt se illi commendare. Sed consilio primorum suorum propter sacramenta quae inter eum et Karolum facta fuerunt, non eos in commendationem suscepit, sed scaram hostilem, cui praefecit Theodericum comitem, quasi in adiutorium illorum contra Nortmannos disposuit.'¹⁸ This passage tells us a number of interesting things. Louis the Younger had given his namesake cousin part of his kingdom on some sort of lease-back arrangement; and the object of the deal must have been Louis's recent acquisition western Lotharingia, as it is here in 881 that we find Louis III building a fort against the Vikings, at Étrun.¹⁹ The terms of the lease were seemingly based on a delegation of military responsibility in the area; hence the fort, hence the assigning of a squadron of troops to the Lotharingians by Louis III, and hence the term 'in locarium' to define the lease, which carried overtones (in Hincmar's usages) of a price paid for military support.²⁰ The motivations lying behind the

¹⁷ AB s.a.870, pp.172-4 gives lists of the territories pertaining to each half. See Map 2.

¹⁸ AB s.a.882, pp.245-6.

¹⁹ AB s.a.881, p.245, with n.1 for the geographical observation; AV s.a.881, p.51.

²⁰ Niermeyer, *Lexicon*, p.618 gathers the evidence; Coupland, 'Poachers', pp.101-2 shows that Hincmar also understood the term to be connected with mercenary service and sometimes associated it with Viking tributes; this hints at disapproval of the arrangement on his part, due

deal contracted between the two kings are not hard to deduce. As well as the need to coordinate defence against the Viking Great Army, which had been harrying the northern coasts and river valleys of all the Frankish kingdoms since 879, Louis the Younger was probably only too glad to delegate the problem of Lothar II's bastard son Hugh of Lotharingia (born c.855), who had just begun agitating against his Carolingian kinsmen in pursuit of the crown of his paternal kingdom. Louis's east Frankish forces had already had to carry out one uncomfortable campaign against Hugh over the winter of 879-80, and its inconclusive outcome may have been enough to convince him that his resources were being overstretched.²¹

If supervision of west Lotharingian military matters was thus devolved into the hands of Louis III, it would appear that Louis the Younger chose to retain control over the distribution of *honores* (offices), a central element in the exercise of royal authority.²² It was he who decided to grant the important west Lotharingian royal monastery of Lobbes to Hugh in late 880 or 881 in an attempt to placate the rebel.²³ Our quotation from Hincmar reveals another limit to Louis III's position, showing that the west Lotharingian magnates were *not* commended to him.²⁴ Aristocratic commendation was nonetheless an essential element of Carolingian division agreements: presumably, therefore, they remained commended to Louis the Younger alone after Ribemont. Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, we should note that even when Louis the Younger died, Louis III refused to accept these magnates as his commended men because of oaths exchanged with Charles the Fat: the implication of this is that by these oaths it had been *prearranged* that Charles should inherit his brother's end of the

probably to his dislike of both Louis III and Louis the Younger and the fact that the separation of west Lotharingia from west Francia divided the lands of Rheims.

²¹ AF s.a.879, pp.93-4. Louis the Younger and Louis III collaborated against Hugh in 880 and 881; see below. These arrangements freed Louis the Younger to pursue his political ambitions in Bavaria and Italy. For his part, Louis III must have welcomed the opportunity to defend a distant frontier which gave him a better chance of keeping the Northmen out of his core west Frankish kingdom, always their main focus of attention. Hugh, as a *tyrannus*, was a threat to Carolingian authority regardless of where he was active.

²² On *honores* see Airlie, 'Aristocracy', pp.443-7.

²³ AL s.a.873 and 880, p.15 shows that Louis the Younger took control of Lobbes personally before passing it on to Hugh in late 880 or early 881; see also Dierkens, *Abbayes*, pp.109-12, 129-30. Neither Louis III nor Carloman II issued any charters for west Lotharingian recipients. In contrast Charles the Fat, who succeeded his brother in his lease deal, also retained control of *honores* there: DD CIII 94, 104 and 105.

lease deal if he died, and Louis III was sticking to this agreement. The significance of this is driven home when it is remembered that in the *Annales Bertiniani* Hincmar habitually stressed the importance of aristocratic opinion in king-making:²⁵ his description of Louis III overruling this opinion in 882 is therefore to be taken very seriously.²⁶

This new arrangement did not, however, last long. Only a few months later in August 882, Louis III himself met a premature end as a consequence of an amorous attempt to pursue a girl through a low doorway, with youthful disregard for the fact that he was on horseback at the time.²⁷ With his report of this death, Hincmar recorded further information relevant to the west Lotharingian lease deal. Carloman II, who had become king of the whole western kingdom as a result of his brother's death, sent legates to an assembly held by Charles the Fat, who was now the only Carolingian ruling in the eastern kingdom: their request was 'partis regni quam frater suus Hludouuicus in locarium acceperat, ut, sicut ipse Karolus olim promiserat, Karlomanno restitueret.'²⁸ At some prior point, then, Charles had also made a promise to Carloman that he would receive western Lotharingia should *his* brother die, and now he wanted to cash in. Therefore, while in January the lease had changed hands automatically, now the tenancy was supposed to do the same thing.

Put together, these two passages point to the conclusion that sometime before 882 the four surviving Carolingian rulers, Louis III and Carloman II in the west, Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat in the east, had made a complex agreement which envisaged the possible early death of one or more of their number, and made provision for succession between the remainder. Peacefully, and without further negotiation, Louis III had kept his lease deal under Charles the Fat after Louis the Younger died 'propter sacramenta quae inter eum et Karolum facta fuerunt'; and on Louis III's own subsequent demise, Carloman claimed western Lotharingia *in locarium* 'sicut ipse Karolus olim promiserat.' The

²⁴ Note also AF s.a.881, p.96 which describes some locations in western Lotharingia as 'in regione regis nostri [i.e. Louis the Younger].'

²⁵ Nelson, 'Hincmar'.

²⁶ This emphasis may imply further disapproval on the part of Hincmar for Louis III's actions. Cf. n.20 above.

²⁷ AV s.a.882, p.52.

protagonists had no way of knowing in which order they would die, and so this agreement must have been designed to take in a number of unknown variables and provisional situations.

Hincmar is clear that the agreement was founded on oaths: when had they been made? The most likely answer is that they were the ‘quaedam sacramenta utrimque’ sworn by the Carolingian kings besieging the usurper Boso inside the walls of Vienne in 880 as they broke off campaigning for the winter.²⁹ The Vienne campaign, prosecuted by all four Carolingian armies and three kings (illness prevented Louis the Younger’s personal attendance), represented an unprecedented show of Carolingian unity against a common foe, a fact which was not missed by any of the major contemporary writers.³⁰ Both aristocratic rebels and external foes like the Vikings and Slavs had been part of the currency of Carolingian politics from the beginning, more often than not finding themselves recruited by one member of the dynasty in pursuit of their internal agendas against another. This approach, which acted as a kind of lightning conductor absorbing and minimising threats against the ruling house while allowing conflict within it, was not, significantly, considered appropriate for dealing with Boso. The Carolingians’ eagerness to cooperate against him demonstrates their recognition of the danger that he posed to all of them: they understood clearly that his rising could not be seen to succeed if confidence in their royal monopoly was to be maintained. The initial success of the combined military effort in the face of which Boso’s support melted away and defected across the lines in a veritable

²⁸ AB s.a.882, p.249.

²⁹ AB s.a.880, p.243. The oath references are often supposed to refer back to the meeting between Charles the Fat, Carloman II and Louis III at Orbe reported in AB s.a.879, p.240; eg. AB p.246, n.1; Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, p.234; Nelson, *Annals*, pp.219, n.20, 223, nn.2-3. However, Hincmar makes no mention of oaths sworn on this occasion, stating only that the kings ‘held talks’. Presumably these concerned the actions of the usurpers Hugh and Boso and began to lay the groundwork for the joint military campaigns of 880.

³⁰ Details are given by AB s.a.880, pp.242-3; AF s.a.880, p.95; AV s.a.880, pp.47-8. Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.879, pp.114-5 offers a perspective favourable to Boso. Hugh was also attacked as part of the same campaign.

flood³¹ thus provided an ideal occasion on which to swear oaths sealing a reorganisation of the Carolingian family settlement.³²

The oaths exchanged before the walls of Vienne, preparatory negotiations for which had probably been ongoing for several months³³, were, however, intended to regulate much more than simply the fate of western Lotharingia. Indeed, we may see them as encapsulating nothing less than a mutually guaranteed succession plan. In marked contrast to the events of the period 875-80, when the deaths of each of five kings invariably inspired a desperate scramble for their successions,³⁴ the period 880-4, which saw the deaths of three, witnessed not a single hostile attempt by a ruling king to take over a recently-vacated kingdom. Where the designated succession arrangements of the dead king were frequently ignored before 880, we have already seen that the oaths of Vienne were explicitly cited as the determining factor in both the peaceful successions in 882.³⁵ 880 was an especially propitious time to come to a new agreement on the Carolingian family settlement, which required clarification after the high number of royal deaths since 875. Indeed, such an agreement was probably considered essential at

³¹ The main evidence for this, gathered by Bautier, 'Origines', pp.56-7, is the sudden appearance of Boso's erstwhile supporters as recipients of Carloman's charters.

³² Louis the Younger's illness-enforced absence from the campaign, on which he was represented by his main general Henry, does not mean he was not party to the agreement sealed there: he was fully involved in the preparatory negotiations (see next note), and the details of the associated territorial and political settlement confirm that his influence on the plan was prominent (see next section).

³³ Since Boso's rebellion, the meetings at Orbe (Charles the Fat, Louis III and Carloman II, late 879), Ravenna (Charles the Fat and representatives of Louis the Younger, Jan.880), Ribemont (Louis the Younger, Louis III and Carloman II, Feb.880) and Gondreville (Charles the Fat, Louis III, Carloman II and representatives of Louis the Younger, June 880), constituted a series of negotiations which must have concerned the projected campaigns against Boso and Hugh and laid the groundwork for the territorial division described below. AB s.a.880, p.241 records that the Gondreville meeting was planned at Ribemont, which shows that the summits were connected.

³⁴ 875: Charles the Bald and Karlmann of Bavaria dispute Italy on death of Louis II; 876: Charles the Bald invades east Francia on death of Louis the German; 879-80: Louis the Younger and Arnulf of Carinthia dispute Bavaria; and Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat dispute Italy on illness and death of Karlmann of Bavaria; Louis the Younger invades west Francia on death of Louis the Stammerer. Even the succession of Louis the Stammerer in 877 was not in full accordance with the plans of his father, although he was Charles the Bald's only surviving son: see now Kasten, *Königssöhne*, pp.461-6. The struggle for Lotharingia in 869-70 should also be remembered here.

³⁵ I.e. Charles the Fat to Louis the Younger, Carloman II to Louis III. Before 880, the initial succession plans of Charles the Bald, Louis the Stammerer and Karlmann of Bavaria were overruled.

this time due to the crucial fact that each of the four survivors lacked legitimate male offspring.³⁶

Moreover, there are strong indications that the four remaining Carolingians continued to cooperate politically in the years following Boso's rising. Four main pieces of evidence support this interpretation. Firstly, the *Annales Fuldenses* report a 'congruum colloquium' held in mid-881 between Louis the Younger and Louis III at Gondreville.³⁷ This royal centre lay on the borderline which had divided Lotharingia into eastern and western halves since 870, and the meeting thus fits with the idea described above of the eastern king dealing with his cousin as a sort of client ruler in the western portion. Our source is not specific about the nature of any discussions, but close attention to its context in the annal can fill this gap for us. The immediately preceding section runs thus: 'Rex [i.e. Louis the Younger] post pascha in Galliam profectus Hugonem Hlotharii ex Waldrata filium ad se venientem in suum suscepit dominium et ei abbatias et comitatus in beneficium dedit, ut ei fidem servaret. Sed ille pravorum usus consilio fidem mentitus regi molestus efficitur; quapropter regis exercitus illum persecutus in Burgundiam fugere compulit.'³⁸ The clear implication is that it was these events which made the Gondreville meeting 'congruum', 'fitting' or 'corresponding': it was convened by Louis the Younger in response to the rebellion and flight of Hugh. We may conclude, therefore, that the purpose of the summit was for Louis to pass over responsibility and instructions, and perhaps troops, for the pursuit of Hugh to his younger cousin while he himself went off to spend the summer in Bavaria.³⁹ Interestingly, we know the identity of one of the monasteries which had been given to Hugh 'in beneficium' as the price for his faith. The west Lotharingian royal abbey of Lobbes, which had for several decades been

³⁶ This factor would have been thrown into sharper focus by the recent deaths of both Louis the Younger's sons, the infant Louis in late 879 (domestic accident), and the illegitimate Hugh in early 880 (fighting the Vikings): Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.882, p.119 and AF s.a.880, p.94 respectively. After around 18 years of childless marriage, Charles the Fat's prospects of producing an heir cannot have appeared bright.

³⁷ AF s.a.881, p.96.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ This was not a new experience for Louis: he and Carloman had led the forces of the bed-ridden Louis the Younger on a campaign against Hugh which set out the previous summer, also from Gondreville: AB s.a.880, p.242. AF s.a.880, p.95 shows the east Frankish general Henry was also involved in leading this army.

controlled directly by members of the Carolingian dynasty and their close allies, was given to Hugh by Louis at exactly this time.⁴⁰ He was subsequently deprived of his lay-abbacy, most probably also in 881, in favour of Bishop Franco of Liège.⁴¹ This event has sometimes been interpreted as a symptom of the supposed general stagnation of Carolingian kingship in the 880s, an emblem of the dynasty's inability to control even its most important royal monasteries in the face of a vigorous and powerful local aristocracy and episcopate.⁴² However, had this been so, we would expect Lobbes to have fallen into the clutches of the bishop of Cambrai, in whose diocese it lay. In view of the context just outlined, it is more plausible that Franco was a deliberate choice by Louis the Younger, who also wanted to build up the bishop of Liège as a counterweight to Rothad of Cambrai, who had been appointed bishop by Louis's opponent Hincmar of Rheims in 879 without deference to royal authority.⁴³ Franco was a safe pair of hands who could be trusted to take over and hold the monastery from the rebellious Hugh, thus depriving him of its considerable resources as a base for his latest uprising.⁴⁴ The transfer was probably effected by Louis III in summer 881, on the authorisation of Louis the Younger, the absent overlord of the region.

A second key piece of evidence is an unusual confirmation charter issued by Charles the Fat for margrave Guy of Spoleto and Otbert, a canon of Langres, in November 882.⁴⁵ While Guy was a *fidelis* (faithful man) of Charles in his capacity as king of Italy, Otbert, as a holder of *honores* in west Francia, must have been considered the *fidelis* of Carloman II. Interestingly, then, from the point of view of cooperative politics, the charter seems to have been enhanced at a later date by

⁴⁰ See above, n.23. Louis may have hoped to encourage Hugh to use Lobbes as a base from which to fight the Vikings. He appears commanding forces against the Northmen in this region in AV s.a.879, p.45.

⁴¹ Warichez, *Lobbes*, pp.40-2 gives a convincing argument for this date.

⁴² De Jong, 'Monasticism', pp.627 and 651.

⁴³ Helvetius, 'L'Abbatat', pp.293-4. Helvetius shows that the kind of distribution of royal monasteries represented by the granting of Lobbes to Franco was absolutely typical of Carolingian monastic policy in this region throughout the second half of the ninth century.

⁴⁴ A decade earlier another rebel, Charles the Bald's son Carloman, had used Lobbes for precisely that purpose. See Dierkens, *Abbayes*, pp.109-11 for comments on the great wealth of the monastery and how this was organised to strengthen the positions of its secular proprietors. Franco had been bishop since before 859 and was celebrated for his exploits against the Vikings: Duchesne, *Fastes*, vol.3, p.193. He remained in high favour under Charles the Fat, as shown by DD CIII 104 (issued to Franco in 884 as the 'deserved reward for his fidelity') and 105. He was also related to the Carolingians: Werner, 'Nachkommen', p.411.

the addition of Carloman's seal.⁴⁶ Thirdly, a contemporary exchange of letters shows that Charles the Fat, on being asked by Pope John VIII to release the Empress Engelberga from captivity in Alemannia (she had been taken there to prevent her from helping the rebellion of Boso, her son-in-law), responded that he would only do so if Louis III and Carloman II agreed.⁴⁷ Finally, after Boso had been effectively defeated in late 880 and was at large in the kingdom of Carloman, it was Charles the Fat who sent men from Italy to help clean up the vestiges of his support.⁴⁸

Incongruously, this last point has been taken by modern historians as a demonstration of hostility between Charles and Carloman.⁴⁹ However, what it really shows, along with the other evidence, is that the cooperation of the Carolingians against Boso on the military campaign of late 880 was no mere flash in the pan. They certainly continued to pool their resources, particularly when it came to dealing with Boso and Hugh who, as usurpers, posed a common threat to the authority of all of them. Most of our examples have shown the elder east Frankish kings Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat holding sway over their younger cousins, and not just in matters directly concerning the west Lotharingian lease. We may well infer from this that they were recognised as having a form of generational seniority in the new family settlement, while the junior parties were content to bide their time until they could inherit the eastern kingdom.⁵⁰ In view of this it is significant that a later charter of Charles refers to Carloman as his

⁴⁵ D CIII 61.

⁴⁶ See Kehr's introduction and notes to this charter. Carloman's envoys, including his main adviser Hugh the Abbot, were present at the assembly where the charter was enacted: AB s.a.882, p.249.

⁴⁷ *Registrum*, no.268 (March 881), in which John also promised to send her back to the Carolingian kings if she again tried to aid Boso or any other anti-royal forces.

⁴⁸ AV s.a.882, p.52: 'Berardus quoque quidam ab Italia veniens Bosonem tyrannum non sinebat quietum esse.' Berardus was a man of Charles the Fat, as king of Italy; see Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, pp.147-8. In the context of family solidarity, note also the prayer clauses in two charters of Carloman II from 881, which, in requesting prayers to be said 'pro omni generis nostri prosapia', may have referred to the whole Carolingian family, rather than, as would have been more usual, just his branch of it: D CII 51 and 55; Ewig, 'Gebetsdienst', pp.61-2. *Collectio Sangallensis*, no.31 is a directive from this period issued in concord by unnamed kings (including, presumably, Charles the Fat) for the organisation of military litanies and fasts. See McCormick, 'Liturgy'.

⁴⁹ Eg. Bautier, 'Origines', p.50.

⁵⁰ Seniority by age, and especially by generation, was an established principle in Carolingian politics, featuring as an element in the *divisiones* of 806, 817 and 878. As we saw in c.1.2, Karlmann may have been intended to enjoy a degree of seniority over his younger brothers.

‘adopticius filius’.⁵¹ Seen from the perspective of the early 880s, therefore, the oaths of Vienne were clearly intended to guarantee the long-term future of the Carolingian dynasty.

3.4: An overlooked Carolingian division plan of 880

In addition to providing the occasion for a renegotiation of the Carolingian family settlement, Boso’s temporarily successful attempt to carve out a kingdom for himself in Burgundy and Provence also created territorial confusion which had to be resolved, because he seized lands belonging to more than one kingdom. A brief overview of some of the evidence for the political geography of the empire can enrich our appreciation of the new political equilibrium and indeed confirm the view that the year 880, rather than ushering in a final age of chaos and conflict, actually saw the settlement of a number of outstanding territorial ambiguities and disputes. Four examples will suffice.⁵²

Firstly, the Lyonnais and Viennois, the heartlands of Boso’s kingdom and the ground chosen for his defiant last stand, belonged after 880 to Carloman II, as revealed by the dating clauses of a series of local charters.⁵³ The young king must have received these not, as is sometimes claimed, from Charles the Fat, but rather from Louis the Younger, since they were attached to the western half of Lotharingia which the latter had received at Ribemont in February 880. Secondly,

⁵¹ D CIII 145. I would attach no legalistic or institutional significance to this term, which was often used in descriptions of Frankish peacemaking; see below, c.6.5. Charles’s seniority is also attested by three charters from the Aquitanian monastery of St-Julien de Brioude from 881-2, which are dated after the imperial rule of Charles the Fat: DD Bri 197, 260 and 263. This dating formula contrasts strikingly with those which recognise Charles’s *kingship* in the area after Carloman II’s death in 884 (DD 13, 34, 131, 175, 200, 219, 223, 240, 271 and 289). Brioude’s proprietor, Bernard of the Auvergne, was a close political ally of the emperor (see below c.4.3), and so these charters can be taken to show his appreciation of Charles’s general seniority to Carloman in the new family settlement, rather than (as does Auzias, *L’Aquitaine*, p.417) confusion in Aquitaine as to who the actual king was. See also *ibid*, pp.541-8.

⁵² Historians writing about this period have noted changes in the political geography of the Frankish kingdoms in the late 870s and early 880s, but have usually done so only in passing and have tended to see them as evidence of confusion and conflict in the royal house: eg. Poupardin, *Provence*, pp.115-7.

⁵³ Lyon: D Sav 27; DD Cluny 24-5, 27-8. Vienne: DD SMV 89, 108 and Appendix A. Here I accept the detailed arguments of Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, p.90, n.104, who anticipates and clears up the objections raised by Bautier, ‘Origines’, p.63 and n.87. Hlawitschka shows that all these charters can be taken to demonstrate a general recognition of Carloman’s authority in this region between 880 and 884, although Boso’s stronghold of Vienne continued to recognise the usurper’s authority until the fall of the town in 882 (D Cluny 26).

Provence proper also went to Carloman, as demonstrated by a charter he issued for the bishop of Marseilles and coins which were minted in his name at Arles.⁵⁴ Provence had been at least theoretically attached to the kingdom of Italy since the 860s, and so Carloman's possession of it must have been conceded by Charles the Fat, who had been king of Italy since 879.⁵⁵ The bulk of Boso's kingdom, which had been largely made up of Provence plus the Lyon-Vienne area, was therefore transferred to the west Frankish kingdom by the two east Frankish kings, who thereby left Carloman II to get on with the job of imposing his authority in these newly-acquired territories during the campaigning seasons of 881 and 882 (as we saw, with some help from Charles).⁵⁶ All this cleared up a previously ambiguous situation in which the status of Provence (which a contemporary observer described as 'semper inter hos et illos fluctuasse dignoscitur') was unclear because of its changing of hands between west and east Frankish rulers in 875 and 877.⁵⁷

A third case, that of the region of modern Switzerland known to historians as Transjurane Burgundy, is worth focusing on a little more closely. The area basically comprised the dioceses of Lausanne, Geneva and Sion, and was of the highest strategic importance as the gateway from the west Frankish kingdom to Italy across the Mons Iovis pass. In 859, Lothar II had granted it to his brother Louis II of Italy in the hope of receiving support in an early twist of his protracted divorce case.⁵⁸ Louis never established a conspicuous presence there, and over the next two decades various kings attempted to impose their influence in the region with varying degrees of success.⁵⁹ This situation meant that the area's political position was ambiguous; but until Louis's death (875), it nevertheless remained at least nominally part of the Italian kingdom. The text of the Treaty of Fauron,

⁵⁴ D C2 72; Poly, *Provence*, pp.233-4; Metcalf, 'Sketch', p.79.

⁵⁵ Ado, *Chronicon*, pp.322-3 for Provence's attachment to Italy, which was still recognised in the division treaties of 870 and 880.

⁵⁶ See Bautier, 'Origines', pp.57-61 on these campaigns.

⁵⁷ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.329.

⁵⁸ AB s.a.859, p.82 gives details. The region was perceived by contemporaries as a coherent unit: see Castelnovo, 'Élites', pp.384-7.

⁵⁹ Charles the Bald attempted to get a foothold by trying to grant Boso a claim to transjurane honores in 869; AB s.a.869, p.167. D AC 64 mentions help given by Karlmann of Bavaria to Hubert of St-Maurice d'Agaune in his acquisition of Lobbes in 864. Historians (eg. Dierkens, *Abbayes*, p.113 n.181) have been puzzled by the link between the two men, but it makes sense if Karlmann and his father were attempting to make inroads into Hubert's other power base at this time, Transjurane Burgundy.

which was agreed between Louis the Stammerer of West Francia and Louis the Younger of East Francia in 878, contains some territorial clauses which are of interest here.⁶⁰ One main concern of the two kings who met at Fouron was the succession to the heirless Louis II, which both considered to remain unsettled, and each of them stated an explicit claim to the kingdom of Italy. In addition to this, however, they proclaimed: 'De regno vero quod Hludouuicus imperator Italiae habuit, quia necdum ex illo aliqua divisio facta est, quicumque modo illud tenet ita teneat, donec Domino volente iterum simul venientes cum communibus fidelibus nostris inveniamus et diffiniamus quid ex hoc melius et iustius nobis visum fuerit.' This declaration cannot refer to Italy itself, since that is dealt with specifically in the next clause. Nor is Provence likely to have been a matter of pressing concern at Fouron: Louis the Younger, certainly, had no logical reason to have designs on that individual region.⁶¹ The clause ought nonetheless to be read in the context of the two kings' stated interest in the Italian crown, and so must relate to Transjurane Burgundy, the gateway to Italy and Louis II's only other *regnum* north of the Alps. That the transjurane territory was the object of dispute between the Carolingians at this time is emphasised by a charter issued in the same year by the *marchio* Rudolf, who had emerged as the main secular authority there during the earlier 870s. This charter was dated in unusual fashion after the regnal years of all three east Frankish kings (Karlmann of Bavaria, Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat).⁶² The circumspection of this formula reflects Rudolf's perception of the insecurity of the situation in Transjurane Burgundy. He himself had been a key figure in the support of the successful Italian campaign of Charles the Bald in 875, and his charter's recipient was none other than Louis II's widow the Empress Engelberga.⁶³ The fact that two such important power-brokers in transalpine Carolingian politics chose to hedge their bets publicly in

⁶⁰ The text is reproduced by Hincmar in AB s.a.878, pp.230-4.

⁶¹ Louis the Stammerer may in any case have considered Provence to be in his sphere of influence, inheriting his claim from his father Charles the Bald.

⁶² D RB I.

⁶³ AB s.a. 875, p.198 for Charles's use of Rudolf's hospitality at St-Maurice d'Agaune.

this fashion should encourage us to take most seriously the evidence for rivalry between kings around the Jura in 878.⁶⁴

Karlmann of Bavaria, as king of Italy, was the man technically in control of the area at the time, but there are nevertheless signs that the angry reference to 'quicumque modo illud tenet' in the text of Fouron is in fact an allusion to Charles the Fat, and that he was the object of Louis the Younger's and Louis the Stammerer's concerted action.⁶⁵ This is the clear implication of a letter sent in 877 by Charles to the archbishop of Besançon, informing him that he was placing a court cleric into the vacant transjurane see of Lausanne.⁶⁶ The same conclusion can be drawn from a letter of Pope John VIII to Charles in 878, warning the king not to infringe on the interests of the pontiff's then-protégé Boso.⁶⁷ These interests cannot have been located in Italy, where Karlmann was still the recognised ruler, but must rather have lain in the Lake Geneva area, where Boso also had properties and claims.⁶⁸ It may well be that Charles's authority here can be back-dated to 871 when, in reaction to a false rumour that Louis II had been killed in southern Italy, he was sent by his father to Transjurane Burgundy 'ut quos posset sacramento ad eius fidelitatem constringeret, sicut et fecit.'⁶⁹ During

⁶⁴ *Collectio Sangallensis*, no.39, a letter of Bishop Anthony of Brescia to Bishop Salomon of Constance in early 878, is a good expression of a similar unease in the political community after the death of Charles the Bald: Anthony was anxious to know which of the three east Frankish kings or Louis the Stammerer would be the new claimant in Italy. Ibid, no.40, Salomon's reply, attempts to assuage Anthony's fears, but rather hedges the issue by talking in general terms of goodwill between kings and concluding that the peaceful settlement would be observed by Louis the Stammerer 'quamdiu domnum Karlomannum spirare noverit.' When it is remembered that Karlmann was not a well man (AB s.a.877, p.218 says that he was close to death at this time), this statement can be seen as implying the continued insecurity of the situation and showing that the Italian claims of the other Carolingians remained very much alive. John VIII's favoured imperial candidate at this point was Louis the Stammerer (Fried, 'Boso', pp.193-208), after whose death he went on to court both Charles the Fat and Louis the Younger (see below).

⁶⁵ *Collectio Sangallensis*, no.27, a letter sent by Louis the Younger to Louis the Stammerer shortly after Fouron to confirm their agreed solidarity, should also be noted as evidence for their joint determination to stand up against an unnamed third party.

⁶⁶ Ibid, no.26. A letter of John VIII (*Registrum*, no. 252) supports this evidence with its (disapproving) reference to agents of Charles making unwelcome use of properties pertaining to the archiepiscopal see of Besançon, in which Lausanne lay.

⁶⁷ *Registrum*, no.110 (Nov. 878).

⁶⁸ Fried, 'Boso', pp.198-9; D BV 19; doubts over this document assuaged by Airlie, 'Behaviour', pp.202-4. See also Poupardin, *Provence*, pp.110-1; Castelfnuovo, 'Élites', p.404 with n.82.

⁶⁹ AB s.a.871, p.183. Charles was thus entrusted by his father with custody of east Frankish interests in the region, which had a bearing on the Italian succession, perhaps to compensate him for the greater say Karlmann was now acquiring in Lotharingian politics. East Frankish ties with the area were also strengthened around this time by the emergence of the margrave Conrad (Rudolf's father), who had controlling interests in both Transjurane Burgundy and Rhaetia:

the 870s, therefore, Charles the Fat seems to have been operating with de facto authority in the region, an authority which was hotly disputed by Louis the Younger and Louis the Stammerer, both enviously assessing it as a stepping stone to Italy.⁷⁰

From 880 onwards, however, Charles's position in Transjurane Burgundy had been recognised by all parties. This is clearly shown by a series of three letters sent by John VIII to Charles, his archchancellor Liutward and the archbishop of Besançon in the middle of that year. The letters discuss the position of Bishop Jerome of Lausanne, who had been deposed by Charles on account of his support for Boso, and had travelled to Rome to plead his case.⁷¹ The episode not only provides further proof of Charles's effective authority across the Jura, but shows that this authority was now perceived as legitimate by Rome: although he disapproved of the king's actions, John's stated wish was 'ut Deo auxiliante ipsa ecclesia proprio nunc recepto pastore sub vestrae clementiae tutamine pacifica iam et quieta consistat.'⁷² John and Jerome had clearly agreed to toe the imperial line. The same image emerges from another set of papal correspondence, this time concerning the see of Geneva in 882.⁷³ Here Charles was the complainant, protesting that the incumbent bishop had been removed unjustly from his see by his metropolitan for failing to declare for Boso in 879 (Archbishop Otramnus of Vienne had been one of Boso's main allies). This time Pope John, having meanwhile deserted the cause of the erstwhile usurper, wholeheartedly agreed. In both these cases, it should be stressed that it was the usurpation of Boso which was the root cause of the dispute and the main obstacle to its solution, and that Charles stood firm to prevail in the diplomatic disruption with Rome which the rebellion had created. On a lower level, charters from the Vaud, around Lausanne,

Schmid, 'Hunfrid', pp.182-7. Interestingly, AA s.a.871, p.180 states that Charles received Rhaetia in 871.

⁷⁰ Louis the Younger's claim to Italy in 879 is further demonstrated by AF s.a.879, p.93, where disapproval is expressed that Charles the Fat had been allowed to take over from Karlmann there; and by *Registrum*, nos.168 (April 879) and 205 (June 879) which show John VIII courting both Charles and Louis as potential protectors of Rome.

⁷¹ *Registrum*, nos.252-4 (all June 880).

⁷² Ibid, no.252. See Duchesne, *Fastes*, vol.3, pp.221-2 for the chronology of events in the see of Lausanne at this time.

⁷³ *Registrum*, nos.292, 299, 303, 306. Charles probably issued far-reaching privileges for the church of Geneva in 881: introduction to D RB 5.

were dated from this point on after Charles's regnal years alone.⁷⁴ His de facto rulership in Transjurane Burgundy had become an acknowledged right.

In part, no doubt, this was because Louis the Younger had given up his designs on our fourth example, Italy. Early in 880 he sent a contingent of bishops along with his archchancellor Liutbert of Mainz to attend Charles's official coronation in Ravenna as king of Italy.⁷⁵ Not only did Louis thus make a public gesture of renunciation, but evidence from the *Liber Vitae* of Brescia shows that the two parties proceeded in tandem to beat a premature retreat out of Italy in order to begin preparations for the joint campaign against Boso later that year.⁷⁶ This agreement, which probably also involved a counter-recognition by Charles of Louis's rights in Lotharingia, needed to be presented to and confirmed by the young west Frankish kings (who may have inherited hopes of Italy from their father Louis the Stammerer) in order to become totally credible. It is likely that their acquiescence was confirmed by the Vienne oaths of winter 880, when the reallocation of Provence and the Viennois-Lyonnais was also agreed.

It is significant that Louis and Charles buried the hatchet in their dispute over Italy as they prepared to cooperate against Boso on the military campaigns of the year 880. It was Boso's usurpation of large tracts of Provence and Burgundy which had brought the ambiguous statuses of various regions into focus, inspiring the four kings to bring these disputes to a conclusion. The political settlement expressed by the oaths of Vienne was thus underpinned by a territorial agreement which carved up Boso's short-lived kingdom and brought its parts back into the Carolingian orbit, setting the seal on the fractious intra-dynastic quarrels of the later 870s with a mutual recognition of a series of claims to territory. Political cooperation would be easier to achieve, it was obviously recognised, if there were fewer outstanding territorial issues to fight about.

3.5: Conclusion: The Carolingian response

⁷⁴ D Laus 433 (28 Feb. 881, dated to the first year of Charles's reign). *Collectio Sangallensis*, additamenta no.2 is a model charter from 881 dated to the second year of Charles's reign 'in Burgundia'. This formula never entered the official chancery repertoire. D CIII 108 from Sept. 884 also concerns transjurane properties.

⁷⁵ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.329.

⁷⁶ Schmid, 'Liutbert', pp.41-60.

What I hope to have shown in this chapter is that two important and viable plans were made in 880 tackling the two key issues of Carolingian dynastic politics, succession and territorial division. These plans were implemented not simply according to some idealised principle of dynastic or imperial unity (after all, other family members like Louis and Carloman's infant half-brother Charles the Simple and the Empress Engelberga were most definitely excluded), but also as a response to the specific circumstances brought about by the revolt of Boso and the lack of available heirs. The agreement was designed to ensure that several pressing political problems were dealt with. The establishment of a distant frontier protected the core east and west Frankish kingdoms from the direct threat of Viking attack, and responsibility for defence of the middle kingdom was delegated to the young western kings. Meanwhile, the concession of Lobbes to Franco of Liège also reveals some measure of reorganisation of Viking defence on the ground in Lotharingia. The cooperation over the Lotharingian question was clearly also intended to deal with the continuing unrest fomented by Hugh, whose activities were thus undermined on two fronts: not only were his outright rebellions put down more effectively, but also his appeal in the eyes of the Lotharingian aristocracy was diluted by their getting what they certainly wanted, a more conspicuous and accessible royal presence. The decisive neutralising of Boso must have helped here by providing clear evidence of the kings' determination to effectively assert their authority in the middle kingdom. Moreover, the succession problem was solved, at least for the time being: it was surely expected that Carloman and Louis would be able to take on the empire after the deaths of their eastern cousins, and moreover produce heirs of their own. The unusual spirit and practice of cooperation generated between the four kings, while it may have been communicated to contemporary observers as an expression of idealised family solidarity, was thus also hard-nosed *Realpolitik*, a careful and considered reaction to a particularly uncomfortable conjunction of events.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, one would be entitled to ask why this seemingly important new division and succession plan was skated over so lightly by our principal narrative sources. This objection can be met with reference to the extreme

⁷⁷ See Schneider, *Brüdergemeine* on the standard unity-rhetoric of Carolingian treaties.

partiality of our two main informants, both of whom had reasons for suppressing direct reports of Carolingian solidarity. Hincmar, our main source, was very much an interested party in 880-2, still publicly furious with Louis III for freezing him out of the position at court which he believed to be rightfully his, and with Louis the Younger for his invasions of west Francia in 879. Consequently these two kings, the immediate architects of the west Lotharingian deal, receive short shrift in the *Annales Bertiniani*.⁷⁸ Their east Frankish equivalent, the *Annales Fuldenses*, are heavily slanted in the other direction. The annalist, a cleric of Mainz and zealous partisan of Louis the Younger, made a systematic attempt to write Charles the Fat out of history, partly in an attempt to emphasise his own king's claims to Italy.⁷⁹ The concept of all-Carolingian solidarity clearly had less attraction for these writers, who represented events differently according to their own agendas, than for their kings. This is why we can only get a comprehensive picture of Carolingian politics at this time by reading both these sets of annals in conjunction with each other and with other types of source.

It would be wrong to infer that the outcome of the royal deal struck in 880 was an unqualified success. Certainly, the success it did have was partly due to the fact that it did not have to stand the test of time. While, as we have seen, the agreement survived the deaths of Louis the Younger and Louis III intact, the fact that Carloman II followed them into an early grave soon afterwards, leaving Charles the Fat in sole charge, meant that it did not have to outlive its honeymoon period. Indeed, the first rumblings of discord could already be heard in late 882, when Charles had been initially reluctant to hand over the west Lotharingian lease to Carloman, perhaps as a result of the latter's failure to join him on campaign against the Meuse Vikings earlier in the year.⁸⁰ Had the situation been radically

⁷⁸ For examples, see Hincmar's negative report of Louis III's victory at the battle of Saucourt (AB s.a.881, p.244) and his damning obituary of Louis the Younger (AB s.a.882, p.245). Cf. nn.20 and 26 above. AV s.a.880, pp.47-8 also puts a negative gloss on Charles the Fat's departure from the siege of Vienne, although ending a campaign as winter approached was standard Frankish practice.

⁷⁹ This is clear from a cursory comparison between the Mainz annals' silence on Charles's involvement in Italian politics during the 870s, which Hincmar reveals as quite conspicuous: see above, c.2, n.11.

⁸⁰ AB s.a.882, p.249 for Charles's reluctance; unfortunately the annals' chronological details are not precise enough to be sure if it actually was Carloman's failure to bring military aid against the

altered by the birth of a new son, or by the coming of age of Charles the Simple, it might have descended into confusion and conflict once again; at any rate, this was the pattern of the on-off fraternal pacts of supposedly everlasting peace agreed between members of the previous generation of Carolingian kings.⁸¹

Nevertheless, despite all the potential for failure it undoubtedly concealed, the Carolingian response to Boso's rising cannot but be seen as a positive one. Not only were questions of territory brought into sharp focus by the usurpation, but so too were political issues.⁸² Boso confronted the Carolingians with the possibility that kings could be made from outside their family, as the first example of such since 751. They therefore faced serious consequences for the status of their monopoly on legitimate royal power and the maintenance of the political myth that only they could be kings.⁸³ The Carolingians were not, as is usually thought, swept along by the force of events, but confronted these threats in resolute and concerted fashion. These people were self-conscious political actors, eminently capable of improvisation, and clearly not as tightly bound by contemporary political norms as is sometimes implied by modern scholarship: they were not imprisoned by their circumstances, but were able to engage with them. The result of their action was an immediate closing of ranks and provision for continuing solidarity, intended to prevent a repeat of the kind of succession dispute which had opened the door for Boso in the first place. The threat posed by Boso's kingship was indeed novel and highly dangerous to Carolingian hegemony. However, the Carolingian response was also novel, an imaginative and constructive attempt to shore up royal authority and circumvent its traditional weaknesses. Internecine struggle was never a feature of Carolingian politics in the early 880s. We can now understand, in this context, the optimism of Notker the Stammerer and his contemporaries for the future of the Carolingians in 881.

By the time Notker's optimism had soured, as he began his *Gesta Karoli* in late 885, the issues had changed. Boso of Vienne and Hugh of Lotharingia, the

Vikings which had upset him. The context of the other evidence presented above implies that the transfer of the lease to Carloman did eventually take place.

⁸¹ The fact that Louis the Younger was first to die conveniently removed the only party to the agreement who had not actually been present at the formal oath-swearing.

⁸² It should be stressed that Louis III was unaffected by the territorial consequences of Boso's actions, yet took a large part in the new family settlement.

'tyranni' against whom Notker had anxiously warned in his earlier work, the *Continuatio*, were out of the picture, the former a fugitive in the hills of Provence deprived of his support, landed base and credibility, the latter blinded and confined to a monastery.⁸⁴ The doubts Notker expressed in the *Gesta* for the continuation of the dynasty were not, therefore, a response to the activities of Boson and Hugh. Rather, the problem was that premature death had claimed all the ruling Carolingians of 880 except Charles the Fat, who remained heirless; the Vienne settlement had completely unravelled itself and the future of the dynasty now hung by the slenderest of threads.

Notker realised that the events of 885 were a mixed blessing for the emperor. While the death of Carloman II allowed Charles to acquire control of the entire Carolingian empire, a position which he expressed in a newly confident ideology of imperial rulership,⁸⁵ the succession problem had to be dealt with yet again. Charles's solution, a Lothar II-style attempt to have his bastard son Bernard legitimised, was on the rocks before the year was out, and the emperor seemed determined to exclude the only other viable claimant, Arnulf of Carinthia: Notker's pessimism was in large part a comment on this situation.⁸⁶ Moreover, Charles was faced with the question of how to make his presence felt across the multiple *regna* now under his rule. This was no small matter, for it was the absence of easily accessible royal authority in the middle kingdom after the death of Lothar II which had enabled the revolts of Hugh and Boson to attract such large followings in the first place. Throughout the rest of his reign Charles had to wrestle with these two interlinked problems, the succession and the governance of the empire, to varying degrees of success. Accordingly, it is with these issues that the following chapters are primarily concerned.

⁸³ I borrow these terms and ideas from Airlie's work; see especially '*Semper*.'

⁸⁴ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330. See Bautier, 'Origines', pp.61-8 on Boson's fate; Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, p.125 is the most detailed account of Hugh's.

⁸⁵ See below, c.6.4.

⁸⁶ See below, c.7.5.

4: EMPEROR, EMPIRE AND ARISTOCRACY

4.1: Kings and aristocrats

One of the main factors which inspired the agreement of Vienne in 880 was to make the Carolingian rulers more accessible to the nobility of Lotharingia. In this it was broadly similar to most other Carolingian family settlements: the aim of subkingship was not only to keep junior members of the royal house happy by allowing them a tangible share in power, but also to give the provincial aristocracy their 'own' king. A nearby royal court was less a hindrance than a potential source of opportunity for high aristocrats, for whom the acquisition of *honores* was of primary importance:¹ the court 'operated like a great railway junction shunting personnel all over the realm'.² Equally, the Carolingians, who by no means wielded absolute power, needed members of the aristocracy to act as mediums to transmit their authority from the palace to the localities. In other words, Carolingian kingship was, from the very beginning, predicated on a close alliance between royal and aristocratic power: the relationship between the two was symbiotic.³

These commonplace observations are, however, frequently disregarded by historians when trying to explain the events leading up to the collapse of the empire in 888, especially in reference to the political problems of Charles the Fat. Here, the king-aristocracy relationship is characterised as oppositional: Charles ruled not with, but rather in spite of the high nobility, who ultimately rose up and seized power for themselves. The *reguli* who became kings in 888 were members of the high aristocracy: therefore, the reasoning goes, any evidence for their activities prior to this date should be read as revealing stages in their 'rise' to kingship. This line of argument is not only teleological, but also rather circular. Because historians assume that the aristocracy 'rose' at the expense of royal power in the later ninth century, the emergence of the tenth-century duchies and territorial principalities is usually studied backwards, with the ninth-century evidence being interpreted from the point of view of the known outcome. Expositions of this supposed process therefore tend not only to presume

¹ See Airlie, 'Aristocracy', pp.443-7.

² Airlie, 'Palace'.

³ As stressed many years ago by Werner: 'Untersuchungen I' and 'Families' are fundamental.

aristocratic strength and royal weakness, but also end up 'proving' the significance of these phenomena.

This type of thinking still lies submerged in many of the standard works on the period: the 'rise of the aristocracy' has become an accepted and largely unquestioned historical reference point which is invoked to explain other phenomena of the late ninth century.⁴ The principal reason for this is historiographical: the model fits very neatly into the traditional grand narrative of medieval European history. In particular, it is still often assumed that to explain the appearance of 'feudalism', 'France' and 'Germany' in the tenth century, it is necessary to postulate a crisis of state power developing throughout the late ninth century and facilitating the shift from 'public' (royal) to 'private' (aristocratic) authority.⁵ The work of Dhondt, whose 1948 book *Études sur la Naissance des Principautés en France* is the classic account of the 'rise' thesis, and perhaps still the most coherent attempt to expound it systematically on the basis of analysis of the contemporary sources, may be mentioned here as an influential example of this approach. Dhondt's argument was essentially that the ninth century saw a centrifugal redistribution of resources, and by implication power, from the Carolingian kings to a grasping aristocracy, speeded up by the exigencies of defence against the Vikings. His thesis remains hugely influential, and sits embedded in many of the more recent standard narratives of the period.⁶

Nevertheless, Dhondt's use of the sources was, as Martindale has convincingly demonstrated, flawed: he paid too little attention to the relative quality of grants made by the Carolingians to the aristocracy, and to the fact that very few charters were actually issued for representatives of its higher echelons.⁷ Moreover, his thesis is founded on the economistic concept that the most important, or even the only important, historically significant way that aristocrats relate to kings is materially. This model tends to ascribe to the aristocracy an

⁴ Eg. Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, pp.48-50; Keller, 'Strukturen', passim; Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', p.120; Kasten, *Königssöhne*, pp.478-9; Lauranson-Rosaz, 'Roi', pp.422-3, 434.

⁵ The importance of regionalism in explaining the collapse of the empire is stressed by Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, pp.23-4 and Fried, 'Kingdoms', p.158. For apposite comments on the historiographical issues, see Barthélemy, 'Debate', p.199; idem, 'Chevalerie', p.168; Reynolds, 'Historiography', pp.124-5; Reuter, *Sonderweg*, pp.210-1.

⁶ For examples see Dutton, *Politics*; James, *Origins*, p.175; McKitterick, *Kingdoms*, pp.235-6.

⁷ Martindale, 'Kingdom'; see also Nelson, *Charles*, pp.54-5, 233.

anachronistic unity of purpose and over-simplistically suggests that royal power is only as enduring as its capacity to distribute material resources, thus underrating its less tangible charismatic elements.⁸ The weakness of the king and the landed strength of the noble houses are thus held to be opposite sides of the same coin.

As well as these methodological problems, the evidential base for the thesis is frail. Recent research has deepened our understanding of the royal-aristocratic relationship, and as a result some of the main monuments of the 'rise' thesis, such as the Treaty of Coulaines (843) and the Capitulary of Quierzy (877), no longer seem as significant as they once did.⁹ Moreover, the key narrative source held to support the traditional view is the Bavarian continuator's account of the overthrow of Charles the Fat, which ascribes the coup to a magnate conspiracy.¹⁰ However, this text ought to be read in a very narrow political context, as a retrospective justification of Arnulf's rising, rather than as an objective assessment of general aristocratic might.¹¹

In other words, the case for the thesis that the Carolingian aristocracy 'rose' against the weakened dynasty and seized royal power remains a largely unproven assumption. In order to assess the model further, this chapter will reconsider the evidence for the nature of the king's relationship with the high aristocracy under Charles the Fat. His reign can be seen as a litmus test for the 'rise of the aristocracy' theory; not only is he the ruler who is held to have succumbed to the process, but the nobles he had to deal with were the future *reguli* themselves. This exercise will also, therefore, allow us to reflect on the oft-repeated opinion that the reunification of the empire was an anachronism and doomed to failure. Historians who have studied this material previously have usually claimed it in support of the traditional paradigm. My argument will be that if their prior assumptions are discarded, a quite different picture can be drawn.

⁸ Wickham, 'Transition', esp. pp.27-9; Fried, *Weg*, p.447. Fleming, *Kings*, esp.c.7 is an application of the same idea to eleventh-century English politics. Useful critiques of this approach are given by Rosenwein, 'Politics', p.249; Wickham and Reuter, 'Introduction'.

⁹ Nelson, 'Intellectual'; eadem, *Charles*, pp.248-51; Airlie, 'Aristocracy', p.444.

¹⁰ BC s.a.887, pp.115-6.

¹¹ Bowlus, 'Early History', p.557. See also c.6.1.

4.2: Odo of Paris and control of Neustria

4.2.1: The 'rise of Odo'

Among the most celebrated and best documented of the post-888 *reguli* is Odo, count of Paris and son of the Capetian progenitor Robert the Strong. The relative profusion of texts associated with his earlier career shows him to have been a man of considerable influence in western Francia before the death of Charles the Fat. Olivier Guillot, in a closely-argued and otherwise illuminating article, has recently taken this observation a stage further, claiming that Odo was exercising royal prerogatives in Neustria during 886 and 887.¹² This is a suggestion with remarkable implications and one of the boldest restatements of Dhondtian views about the late ninth century, and so Guillot's arguments are worth examining in detail.

Firstly he contests that a late ninth-century Neustrian letter collection, which is mostly concerned with the ecclesiastical affairs of the church of Orléans, reveals a support network centred on Odo and extending from western Neustria to as far away as Sens, and that this is politically significant.¹³ The crucial text for this view is a letter, probably written in 887, from the widow of the lay abbot of St-Symphorien, Orléans, to Archbishop Walter of Sens, complaining that 'Odo comes et consanguineus noster', along with Count Hucbald of Senlis, has usurped some of her land.¹⁴ However, it is clear that the properties seized by Odo, and hence in his sphere of influence, are in the Orléannais rather than in the environs of Sens.¹⁵ In fact, their seizure seems to have been directly connected by the widow with the imperial gift to Odo in 886 of the *honores* of his father in Neustria, specifically the county of Orléans: she complains that Odo committed the offence 'posteaquam illam, quam scitis, nostris in partibus adeptus est sublimitatem.'¹⁶ The appeal to archbishop Walter as a patron was relevant rather because his uncle was Bishop Walter of Orléans, in whose diocese the lands lay. Certainly, Walter of Sens was a political ally of Odo in 888, when he crowned him king, but this is not a particularly strong piece of evidence on its own for a claim

¹² Guillot, 'Étapes', p.203.

¹³ Ibid, pp.203-4.

¹⁴ Bischoff, *Anecdota*, pp.131-2.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.131 n.1.

that Odo had authority in the Sens area in 887. There is of course absolutely nothing unusual in a noble like Odo, a member of the *Reichsaristokratie*, having associations with others in regions as relatively close to Paris as Sens or Senlis. The real value of this letter is the rare glimpse it affords the reader of the situation under the surface of a change of authority in a region, showing, unsurprisingly, that there were losers as well as winners. We should not have to think that such flaunting of newly acquired powers was unusual or a politically significant challenge to royal authority, simply because it does not quite tally with the impression of smooth handovers of *honores* as reported by narrative sources. Indeed, the fact that the widow associated Odo's actions with his assumption of the countship in Orléans shows that he was able to carry out these acts exactly *because* of the commission he received on royal authority, and not in spite of it.

This is also the impression given by the imperial charters issued for the count. In 886 Odo handed over lands to the canons of St-Martin Tours, whose lay abbot he had just become, and this gift was included in two general charters of confirmation issued by Charles the Fat.¹⁷ Odo also brought Charles's attention to and acquired approval for a precarial grant in the Orléannais made by Archbishop Adalald of Tours and Bishop Raino of Angers to Abbot Hugh of St-Aignan.¹⁸ In these charters we see Odo seeking imperial support and approval for activities and transactions being carried out right at the heart of his personal and geographical networks in Neustria.

Secondly, Guillot makes a case for the exercise of royal power by members of the Neustrian aristocracy based on epithets given them in these letters.¹⁹ He stresses in particular an introductory note written by Walter of Orléans for a monk en route to Italy, which asks the reader to offer prayers for a list of dead *seniores*, emperors, kings and various churchmen.²⁰ Guillot claims that Hugh the Abbot, Odo's predecessor in Neustria, is listed among the kings, but the wording is ambiguous enough to permit serious doubt on this. The text reads: 'Karoli scilicet imperatoris augusti, Hludovici ac Hludovici et Karlomanni regum,

¹⁶ Ibid, p.132. AV s.a.886, p.62 for Charles's grant to Odo.

¹⁷ DD CIII 139, 146.

¹⁸ D CIII 143.

¹⁹ Guillot, 'Étapes' p.204.

Hugonis excellentissimi abbatis adiungentes his Ottranni quondam Viennensis archiepiscopi, Evrardi Sennonensis, Gauzlini Parisiaci necnon Airbaldi...'²¹ The phrase 'adiungentes his' could easily refer to all those, including Hugh, listed after the closing word 'regum'. In addition, according to Guillot, the word 'excellentissimus' used for Hugh here, and 'sublimatus' applied to Odo elsewhere,²² are indications of their holding 'a quasi-royal preeminence.'²³ Here, however, these terms are being used in untechnical and subjective contexts, designed to show a degree of humility appropriate in the composition of a request for patronage. In any case, it can further be argued that such laudatory epithets were entirely appropriate for application to lay abbots in the later ninth century, and were by no means a sign of a usurpation of a royal prerogative.²⁴

Thirdly and most strikingly, Guillot suggests that Odo can be shown to have been regally distributing *honores* in the west while Charles the Fat still theoretically ruled.²⁵ A letter directed to the church of Auxerre by Walter of Orléans, urges the clergy to ignore the imperial candidate for the episcopal vacancy, one Teutbertus, and to choose instead a good man who will not act as a compliant bureaucrat.²⁶ They appear to have taken heed: Charles's attempted appointment, which flouted a concession of free election made to Auxerre by Carloman II,²⁷ seems, on the evidence of the *Gesta Pontificum Autissiodorensium*, to have been obstructed, since that text lists a man called Herifridus as the successor to the late Bishop Wibaldus.²⁸ The *Gesta* relates all this as having taken place during the reign of an emperor Charles, but also says that it was a king (*rex*) who sent Herifridus to be invested after taking *consilium*.²⁹ Guillot's case, then, is that since Charles the Fat, *imperator*, had tried to impose Teutbertus, Herifridus must have been selected by Odo, who is to be identified with the *rex* of the *Gesta*. Obviously, such an epithet would be highly significant for our view of the politics

²⁰ Bischoff, *Anecdota*, pp.128-9.

²¹ Ibid, p.129.

²² Ibid, p.132.

²³ Guillot, 'Étapes', p.204.

²⁴ Koziol, *Begging*, pp.27-8, 38-9.

²⁵ Guillot, 'Étapes', pp.204-6.

²⁶ Bischoff, *Anecdota*, pp.129-30.

²⁷ D C2 71.

²⁸ *Gesta Pontificum Autissiodorensium*, p.360.

²⁹ Ibid, pp.360-1.

of the 880s if it can be assumed to apply to Odo of Paris. Herifridus was a relative of Walter of Orléans and Walter of Sens (who invested him), and hence plugged into Odo's network of connections in the Neustrian aristocracy, but Guillot's argument relies too heavily on a literal reading of the *Gesta*, which may be unreliable. In the first place, doubt is cast on the distinction he makes between Charles *imperator* and Odo *rex* by the various chronological and terminological inaccuracies of the text, which is consistently vague on events outside Auxerre and its properties. For example, Bishop Heribald (d.857) is wrongly referred to as archchaplain.³⁰ In any case, the section of the work concerning events after 872 was not composed until the mid-930s, almost half a century after our case; a possible retrospective attribution of the royal title to Odo, if that is who is meant, is from this perspective totally understandable as a result of hindsight.³¹ Moreover, the *Gesta* does not explicitly mention any dispute over the appointment, so Guillot's case rests solely on this use of the word *rex* and the Orléans letter. In view of this, the logic of the text does not seem to bear him out, because it says that on the death of the old bishop, news was immediately sent to the *rex*. If, as our letter seems to show, Walter/Odo's attempt to impose an alternative candidate was in *response* to Charles's initial proposal of Teutbertus, then surely this implies that Charles had been the first recipient of the news, the first recourse for the *consilium* of the clergy, and hence the *rex* of the *Gesta*. Charles was, of course, a king as well as an emperor.

In short, the *Gesta* is too rickety a foundation on which to build as precise an argument as Guillot's for the use of the word *rex* applying to Odo of Paris in the 880s. This leaves us with the fact that Charles's attempted appointment of Teutbertus was opposed, and that Herifridus, a man with connections to the Neustrian circle of Odo, seems to have succeeded. However, the significance of this observation depends very much on the assumptions with which the observer approaches it. Guillot's point of view is, of course, explicitly an account of 'Les étapes de l'accession d'Eudes au pouvoir royale', and this apparently leads him to characterise Odo's relationship with Charles as oppositional. Odo, we know, was

³⁰ Wattenbach, Levison, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, Vol. 5, pp.569-70.

³¹ For further observations on the work's sources and inaccuracies, see Janin, 'Heiric'.

shortly to become king, and hence the power which he is seen to exercise is considered to be at the expense of Charles's. But there is, conversely, nothing here to suggest that Odo was not exerting authority at the emperor's delegation, and in this non-sinister sense it could be legitimately termed 'quasi-royal'. If he did intervene along with bishop Walter to influence the episcopal appointment this may well have been expected behaviour in terms of his delegated authority.³²

Beyond this, all that the evidence explicitly reveals is a senior bishop objecting to royal interference in an election which one of the king's predecessors had promised would be free, and urging the clergy to re-stage it. In the big picture, this is at most a slight blurring round the fringes of royal power. Narrative sources and royal charters alike present a smooth surface covering transfers of royal authority, and we do well to remember that there must always have been winners and losers, like the lay abbot of St-Symphorien's widow or the bishop-elect Teutbertus. We can sometimes only observe such disputes by reading between the lines: from recent history, Louis III had capitulated very publicly over the filling of the episcopal vacancy of Beauvais in 881.³³ Each royal charter, apparently self-explanatory and complete, potentially conceals a conflict, and conflict may conceivably have been the norm.³⁴ It is only because of a coincidence of the available sources that this can be seen more clearly than usual in the Auxerre case, showing how the king was only in touch with one of the involved factions. In any case, we do not know how this dispute was eventually resolved; there is no hint in any source of anything comparable to Louis III's humiliating promise to Hincmar to perform penance for daring to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs. In fact, given that Bishop Wibaldus had expired on 12 May 887 and Herifridus was invested on 29 August, it is surely eminently possible that the solution was reached amicably when Odo, clearly still in favour, appeared at the imperial court in mid-June.³⁵

³² Werner, 'Duchés', p.38.

³³ Devisse, *Hincmar*, pp.985-7; Bund, *Thronsturz*, pp.501-3. Cf. Louis the Younger's failure to influence an appointment to the see of Cambrai: see above, c.3, n.43.

³⁴ See Merta, 'Recht', who stresses that royal charters were often produced precisely in order to paper over such disputes.

³⁵ DD CIII 160, 161. D 145 shows Charles the Fat was recognised in Auxerre in late 886.

4.2.2: The evidence of Abbo of St-Germain-des-Prés

There is a broader problem lying behind the interpretation of this case, that of prioritising types of historical proof. Both sides are arguably based on ambiguous evidence. Is it possible for Guillot to demonstrate Odo's regnal authority in the 880s by citing this episcopal dispute, and equally is it valid to consider him disproven by reference to precedents and parallels? In the wider perspective, is the 'failure' of Charles the Fat and the 'success' of Odo of Paris demonstrated by the cataloguing of incidents such as the Viking truces of Asselt and Paris, or the deposition of 887? To transpose what Walter Goffart persuasively argued with reference to historians of the fall of another empire: 'Events, when treated seriatim, with due attention to the very limited consequences of each one, neither explain the growth nor the decline of empires... In investigating questions such as the rise and fall of empires, the subject of inquiry should be what contemporaries thought, not only what they did.'³⁶ In view of the ambiguity of some of the evidence used by Guillot, this observation seems especially relevant to the issue of the relationship between Odo and Charles.

To address the question of contemporary perceptions, we are fortunate to have the poem *Bella Parisiacae Urbis* written by Abbo, a prolix monk of St-Germain-des-Prés and eye-witness of the sieges of 885-6.³⁷ This is a somewhat unusual text written apparently in two phases (the first, longer, draft c.890, with additions made in the mid-890s), at its author's claim both as a scholarly exercise and as a warning to others who would in future face Viking attack.³⁸ Some historians have been keen to see in Abbo's verse an exposition of the great courage and bravery of Odo, and hence explanation for his rise and for west Frankish disillusionment with Charles the Fat.³⁹

Certainly, given that Abbo wrote shortly after Odo's ascent to kingship this would not be surprising, and the new king clearly occupies centre stage. He is, for instance, distinguished by Abbo not simply due to his actions, but according to his superior moral rank, when he repeatedly refers to him as the 'future king',

³⁶ Goffart, 'Zosimus', p.107.

³⁷ Abbo, *Bella*, p.14 for his own place in events.

³⁸ Ibid, p.4. Wattenbach, Levison, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, vol.5, pp.581-2 for the dating.

such as on his first appearance in the poem: 'Hic consul venerabatur, rex atque futurus. Urbis erat tutor, regni venturus et altor.'⁴⁰ The poet spells out in his introduction that the main players in his tale will be Odo and St. Germanus,⁴¹ and at one point he lists the names of the defenders of the town with the observation that 'sed nobilior fuit Odo.'⁴² When he concludes his work it is 'although' Odo still lives, implying that the natural endpoint would in fact be the king's death.⁴³ And although other men, notably Bishop Gauzlin, Abbot Ebolus and Bishop Askericus come to the forefront to receive Abbo's praise, these men were not just Odo's brothers-in-arms but his later political allies in the time of the poem's composition, the latter two both serving as archchancellor under him.⁴⁴ It is a tempting and plausible thought that Abbo started writing as a commission from Odo in the early years of his reign, or at least that the king read or heard the poem, given the close manuscript links between texts associated with his elevation to the kingship and writings surrounding the cult of St. Germanus.⁴⁵ With this in mind it is revealing that the poem does make an implicit point about the elevation of Odo, ignoring or smoothing over some of the conspicuous political opposition he faced in 888 and beyond, and stressing his place as immediate successor to the deceased Charles the Fat.⁴⁶

In stressing this 'official' view of Odo and of his succession, Abbo comes to us something like the new king's Einhard. His view of Odo may not be as skilful or as charged with polemic as Einhard's of Charlemagne, but he remains a politically correct apologist for a new dynasty. He writes with enthusiasm for Odo's qualities in the earliest section, to be dated during the period of the first realisation of the new king's authority.⁴⁷ His disappointment in the final few pages, which are part of the later second draft, serves only to heighten our sense of

³⁹ Most recently Dutton, *Civilization*, pp.483-5, note especially the selective translation. A conspicuous exception to the prevailing reading is Wallace-Hadrill, 'Franks', p.208.

⁴⁰ Abbo, *Bella*, p.18; also pp.22-4, 34, 78.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp.4-6.

⁴² Ibid, p.34.

⁴³ Ibid, p.112.

⁴⁴ For Gauzlin see Werner, 'Gauzlin'; for Ebolus and Askericus see Bautier's introduction to DD OP, pp.xxi-xxix.

⁴⁵ Werner, 'Gauzlin', p.459, n.214.

⁴⁶ Abbo, *Bella*, pp.98-100; Guillot, 'Étapes', p.218.

⁴⁷ Wattenbach, Levison, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, Vol.5, p.581.

Abbo's earlier belief in Odo's king-worthiness. His representation of Odo's relationship with the man he replaced as king is therefore of great interest.

Charles the Fat comes into his picture in control as the legitimate emperor. Where Odo is simply 'rex futurus', Abbo makes Gauzlin say: 'Urbs mandata fuit Karolo nobis basileo, imperio cuius regitur totus prope kosmus post Dominum, regem dominatoremque potentum.'⁴⁸ The emperor is here described in the highest terms, given his orthodox Carolingian place behind God in the rulership of the world and, explicitly, as the man from whom Gauzlin, Odo and their colleagues claim to derive their own authority. When things got uncomfortable, it was to Charles, 'basileus Francorum', that Odo went for reinforcements.⁴⁹ However, even more than a clear view of this order of precedence, Abbo's sentiment matches the exalted terms he uses. In the first passage cited above, Gauzlin goes on to stress that the power of the *basileus* is *effective* power. He is not just king, but also 'dominator'.⁵⁰ There is no hint of reproach for Charles's late arrival on the scene; he came when he was asked and the arrival of his troops was greeted with profound happiness in Paris.⁵¹ His army reflects the extent of his authority—he arrives 'circumdatus armis omnigenis... comitatus opimo, diverso populo labii'—and it immediately inflicts a heavy defeat on the enemy.⁵² Finally, Abbo did not see the deal struck by Charles allowing the Vikings to stay in Burgundy until spring as a compromise. Without any disapproval for the king, the poet instead turns on the Burgundians, who he considers thus well repaid for their failure to provide military aid for Paris.⁵³ This distaste for the people of both Burgundy and Aquitaine is a feature of Abbo's work, and presumably springs partly from the resistance of factions in those regions to Odo's rule at the start of his reign.⁵⁴ He harbours no such feelings for eastern leaders such as Charles or the Saxon *dux*

⁴⁸ Abbo, *Bella*, p.18.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.78.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.18.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.80; Odo is not mentioned again until Charles's death at p.99.

⁵² Ibid, p.90.

⁵³ Ibid, pp.90-2. Similarly, at pp.100-2 he does not criticise Odo for buying off the Vikings in 889.

⁵⁴ Wattenbach, Levison, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, Vol.5, p.582.

Henry.⁵⁵ In practical terms, it also appears from the witness of this text that the Vikings in fact observed the deal struck to keep them out of Paris.⁵⁶

Another striking contrast in the later stages of the *Bella* is between the author's approving references to Charles the *basileus* and his admonitory address to Francia, for its pride and in misusing the purple 'to keep warm'.⁵⁷ By the time of writing this section, it is the present which lacks glory and honour for Abbo, the fading abilities of king Odo, not the good old days of the 880s. Such is the strength of this sentiment in the text that Édouard Favre was moved to suggest implausibly that these sections must have been composed before Charles's death, that is to say he thought only this could explain why Abbo would have been so favourable to the emperor, with the passages referring to Odo as future king interpolated later.⁵⁸ If we free ourselves from Favre's assumptions, it is clear that he was more hindered in his analysis by teleology than Abbo was.⁵⁹ It is not so surprising that Abbo expressed grief at the death of Charles the Fat.⁶⁰ On this point, then, the depiction of the dynastic predecessor of his king, Abbo clearly parts company with Einhard. Abbo's Charles III is anything but Einhard's Childeric III, *rex inutilis*; if anything, Abbo's Odo is Louis the Pious to Charles the Fat, his Charlemagne. It might not be pushing the metaphor too far to say that Odo's Einhard, his real apologist, is less Abbo than modern historians like Dhondt, Favre or Dutton.

4.2.3: The charter evidence

Brunner has used diplomatic evidence to make substantially the same case as Guillot, claiming that the evidence of two comital charters reveals that Odo in

⁵⁵ On him, Abbo, *Bella*, p.66.

⁵⁶ The broken treaty mentioned in the poem seems to me to refer not to Charles's deal but to a second agreement made by the inhabitants of Paris to prevent them ravaging the Meaux area, where Odo and Askericus both had interests (ibid, pp.96-8). The troubles incurred in Paris when the invaders passed through must have been on the way south, as part of Charles's treaty, rather than en route north in violation of it, since Askericus, who is mentioned by Abbo, would have been at the imperial court in May 887: ibid, pp.94-6; AV s.a.887, pp.63-4. Bearing in mind the chronological confusion of the latter part of Abbo's work, I would suggest that it is the report of the largely peaceful encampment which refers to the Viking return down the Seine; Abbo, *Bella*, pp.92-4. Cf. Asser, *De Rebus*, c.84, p.71.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.112.

⁵⁸ Favre, *Eudes*, p.vi.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.40; cf. Schneidmüller, *Tradition*, p.107; Dutton, *Civilization*, p.483.

the 880s had a perception of his own position which went well beyond his comital or abbatial roles.⁶¹ In particular he refers to charters in which Odo employed the episcopal epithet 'humillimus', arguing that this reflects the count's aspiration to a legitimate royal 'Herrschaftsanspruch'.⁶² However, Bautier has shown that one of these charters is a forgery, while the other is an 11th-12th century copy full of verbal anachronisms.⁶³ Brunner further claims that the reason for Odo's not appearing as *marchio* in any charter of Charles the Fat is that he rejected royal authority. This idea is patently unconvincing, as it begs the question of why then Charles would continue to issue charters in favour of Odo as count and abbot.

It is rendered even more unconvincing by an examination of two further charters from 887, one issued each by the scribes of Odo and Charles.⁶⁴ The Charles the Fat document, a June 887 confirmation of St-Martin's Italian holdings, confirms a return to the community of properties, which had presumably become absorbed into the abbatial holdings over the decades, in Odo's charter of two months previously, which he had issued as count and abbot. Interestingly, only parts of the Odo text are reused in the royal diploma. There are no direct verbal borrowings, since the chancery's main model was a charter of Louis the Stammerer, and even the list of properties does not tally exactly, the imperial charter repeating a tradition of interpolations found in series of royal confirmations from Charlemagne to Otto III.⁶⁵ Significantly, the shared elements are in the prayer clauses. Charles confirmed the grant for the sake of the souls of Odo and his parents, specifically Robert the Strong. This is an almost unique provision in any known charter of Charles the Fat, in which living magnates are not usually associated, even as here indirectly, with the spiritual benefits of the confirmation or grant. The archchancellor Liutward, another court figure whose power has been seen as eclipsing that of the emperor, is the only parallel.⁶⁶ In allowing this sentiment to be formalised, the chancery thus associated Odo's name with a position normally reserved for the royal family, and which was intimately

⁶⁰ Abbo, *Bella*, p.98.

⁶¹ Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', pp.274-6.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.276.

⁶³ DD OP 57 and 58, with Bautier's commentary.

⁶⁴ These are D OP 55 and D CIII 160, both of which are modern copies of originals.

⁶⁵ See Bautier's commentary on D OP 55.

bound up with prayers for the longevity of the dynasty and the *stabilitas regni*.⁶⁷ This and the extraordinarily high value of the penalty clause (600 lbs. of gold) testify to Odo's closeness to Charles at this point.

If Charles was keen to endorse such pious actions performed by Odo, the fact that Odo came all the way from Tours to Kirchen to obtain this confirmation is also significant. His self-perception as revealed in the Tours charter backs this up. He returns the properties not only for the good of his own soul and that of his father, but also, and firstly, for the eternal life of Charles the Fat, 'a Deo electum imperatorem, domnum et seniore nostrum.' Masses are to be said for Charles in which 'participem volumus adesse', and only then for Odo himself ('deindeque nos'). It is not surprising to find such politically correct sentiments in public documents like these. The surprise is that historians have felt the need to try to find a way round them, to make them say the opposite of what they seem to say.⁶⁸ The charters, Abbo and the Neustrian letters, the formal and informal texts from both sides, project the same image of Odo. He was a powerful magnate, obviously with considerable freedom of movement in his Neustrian command, peculiarly close to the king, and, by his own and his supporters' testimony, conspicuously subordinate to him.

4.3: The aristocracy and the empire

As the foregoing discussion should have shown, the power of the 'rise of the aristocracy' theory still casts a long shadow over some modern historians, who often seem to bring his assumptions with them to their evaluations of the contemporary sources. Aristocratic landed power is still seen, in the post-Charles the Bald period at least, as existing in opposition to the king. Undeniably, men like Odo were from families of considerable landed wealth and political influence. How best, then, to characterise the relationship between these 'local' power bases and the royal court in the 880s?

⁶⁶ D CIII 92. Cf. D 145 mentioning Hugh the Abbot, but posthumously. On Liutward, see c.6.6.2.

⁶⁷ Cf. D CIII 146, in which Odo is associated very closely with the emperor's gift: 'deprecante Odone comite in nostra elemosina ac sua'. For comments on the analogous position of Boso in some of Charles the Bald's charters, see Airlie, 'Behaviour', pp.220-2.

⁶⁸ Favre, *Eudes*, p.73 thought that Odo's apparent deference to Charles must have been sarcastic.

Firstly, the case of Odo shows that his rise was certainly not based exclusively on a concentration of family properties. The last thing Charles did before leaving Paris in 886 was to distribute *honores* to those who had impressed him: 'Episcopo quoque in ipsa civitate delegato, Askricho nomine, et terram patris sui Rothberti Odoni comiti concessam.'⁶⁹ While this sentence implies that Odo was Robert's direct successor 20 years after his death, it is in fact not so self-explanatory. Robert's properties were not as cohesive as implied by Regino's anachronistic description of them as 'ducatus inter Ligerim et Sequanam.'⁷⁰ His career under Charles the Bald was actually a typically unstable one, including an extended period of rebellion and a significant amount of time during which he ceded his Neustrian power base to the subkingship of Louis the Stammerer.⁷¹ The career of Hugh the Abbot, Robert's replacement in the Breton march, was similarly patchy, including a spell out of Charles the Bald's patronage in the Middle Kingdom as would-be archbishop of Cologne.⁷² The point is that, despite the presence of certain key *honores* in the possession of Robert, Hugh and Odo at various points in their lives, the Neustrian offices do not constitute a continuous core in the build-up of an entrenched territorial power. For example, Odo was count of Paris, Robert was not. Robert was count of Blois, unlike either Odo or Hugh.⁷³ Under Charles the Bald it was the will of the king that sent Robert from Neustria to Burgundy, and likewise transferred his *honores* to Hugh the Abbot, member of a family sometimes supposed to have been politically opposed to the Robertians.⁷⁴ If Charles the Bald created territorial commands, he also unmade them and reallocated them. Likewise, in 886 it was the king, Charles the Fat, who decided that Hugh's position should revert to Robert's son Odo. This, rather than continuity in *honores* or properties, is the overriding link between the political careers of Robert, Hugh and Odo. Continuity of holding does not in any case say anything about how a magnate might choose to use such power; Hugh, for

⁶⁹ AV s.a. 886, p.62.

⁷⁰ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.861, p.79; for the anachronism see Nelson, *Charles*, pp.166-7; cf. Werner, 'Robertiens', p.19.

⁷¹ See Favre, *Eudes*, pp.1-6; Nelson, *Charles*, pp.183-7, 194-7.

⁷² On various aspects of his career, see Favre, *Eudes*, pp.7-11; Werner, 'Gauzlin', passim; Nelson, *Charles*, pp.177-9, 190-1; Sassier, *Recherches*, pp.3-9.

⁷³ Favre, *Eudes*, pp.12-4.

⁷⁴ Eg. Werner, 'Gauzlin', pp.417-22; Favre, *Eudes*, p.12; Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', p.274.

instance, spent many of his later years away from Neustria at the side of Carloman II in his Burgundian/Aquitainian kingdom. Odo's rise in 886, then, was not as neatly in succession to his father as the *Annales Vedastini*'s terse report implies, but rather a direct result of his closeness to the emperor Charles.⁷⁵ Any account which neglects this dimension of his career must be inadequate.

Even if men like Odo, imperial aristocrats, expected office, it was evidently still the king's to distribute. The political significance of this, especially in the years 885-7, can be discussed by reference to the other, less well documented, of the big men of Europe in Charles's reign. Rudolf of Burgundy, another of the *reguli* of 888, is also one of only three men named as *marchio* in the charters of Charles the Fat.⁷⁶ As is well known, by the later ninth century, and from the 880s onwards in particular, this term referred to an official holding delegated royal authority over a plurality of counts in one area, a count over counts.⁷⁷ That it was no longer a designation appropriate to the holder of a frontier marcher command is self-evident from the location of Rudolf's sphere of influence in Transjurane Burgundy. Rudolf had become the main aristocratic player in this region during the earlier 870s, in succession to his father Conrad: as we saw in the previous chapter, he had very probably become a close ally of Charles after the latter began to exert authority in the area, perhaps as early as 871.⁷⁸ If Charles was not officially recognised as king in Transjurane Burgundy until 880, we ought not to be surprised when we find Rudolf in attendance at the Lotharingian accession ceremony of Charles in 885, and again at the Metz war council on the way to relieve the siege of Paris in 886.⁷⁹ We also meet the *marchio*'s *fidelis* Vodelgis, and by implication possibly Rudolf himself, in the imperial entourage in Italy in February 885, facilitating Charles's journey to assume the west Frankish kingship.⁸⁰ Monks from Moutier-Grandval and Count Liutfrid, representative of a powerful transjurane family associated with the

⁷⁵ DD CIII 143 and 161 show that Odo acknowledged Hugh as a predecessor as well as Robert.

⁷⁶ D CIII 112.

⁷⁷ Werner, 'Missus', pp.213-8; Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', pp.207-11.

⁷⁸ See c.3.4. On Rudolf's rise see the introduction to DD RB, pp.5-8.

⁷⁹ DD CIII 116, 137; AFC s.a.886, p.105 for the assembly. See c.5.2 for identification of Rudolf and discussion of the Lotharingian ceremony.

⁸⁰ D CIII 112; see c.5.2.

monastery, were also present at the outset of this Italian expedition.⁸¹ The presence of Liutfrid as petitioner on behalf of the abbey suggests that, contrary to what Poupardin thought, his family retained its connections to Moutier-Grandval under Rudolf and that he was one of the counts subordinate to the *marchio*.⁸² The outlines of Charles's authority in the region can therefore be discerned: he championed the position of the relative newcomer Rudolf over that of more established local families such as that of Liutfrid, who nevertheless continued to obey the imperial summons. Rudolf may have been calling the shots in local affairs, but he did so with royal support and approval: moreover, the position of Liutfrid shows that the *marchio*'s men were also the king's men.

Rudolf himself depicted his own position in exactly the same terms used for him by the king in the royal charters. When he underwrote the gift of lands north of Lake Geneva to the church of Lausanne by his man Reginold later in 885, he did so as Charles's *comes* and *marchio*.⁸³ This royal connection can only have strengthened his local authority. And as a supporter of Charles, it was presumably Rudolf who prevented the bishops of Geneva and Sion from participating in the election of Boso at Mantaille, and cooperated in dealing with the collaborator who had sat in the see of Lausanne.⁸⁴ Therefore, whereas the rise of the family of Conrad and Rudolf in Transjurane Burgundy was a result of their grasping of the opportunities available in the confused politics of the Middle Kingdom in the 860s, and despite the probable role of Louis II as the most important royal authority in this,⁸⁵ the clear implication is that in the 880s Charles the Fat used the existing configuration of their power to establish his own effective delegated authority by making Rudolf a *marchio* supervising other royal officials in the area. He was able to do this because of his personal relationship with Rudolf, not with the wide-reaching landed might of his clan. The respective positions of king and *marchio* relied on each other, and both put down deeper roots because of this, not

⁸¹ D CIII 108. Most of the goods confirmed are in the heart of the Swiss Jura. This family is known to historians as the Etichonids.

⁸² Poupardin, *Bourgogne*, p.79; cf. Büttner, 'Studien', pp.319-21.

⁸³ D RB 19 ('Signum Rodulfi gloriosi comitis... imperante donno nostro Karolo tercio'), and 2 ('Rodulfus comes nec non etiam inclitus marchio').

⁸⁴ Poupardin, *Provence*, pp.109-10.

⁸⁵ Eg. *ibid.*, pp.57-8.

in spite of it. Rudolf, like Odo, almost certainly waited until his lord was dead before proclaiming his own kingship in 888.⁸⁶

The second of Charles's *marchiones*, Bernard Plantevelue, did not become one of the *reguli*, but did found a famous Aquitainian ducal line; Dhondt and Auzias considered him a smart operator, exercising all the practical authority of a king without assuming a hollow title which would bring Carolingian anger down on him.⁸⁷ Brunner likewise discussed his career in terms of the 'rise' of his house, but again this approach seems to me to be too much governed by hindsight to provide a useful way of observing the politics of the 880s.⁸⁸ Like Rudolf, his involvement in the high politics of the 860s and 870s was the key to his building up of a large block of lands and *honores*, in eastern Aquitaine and the Auvergne.⁸⁹ Despite the lack of narrative source evidence for Bernard in the 880s, there is enough to suggest that, like Rudolf and Odo, he was a representative of Charles, in command of royal officials in a territory based around his own power base in southern France. He was also a conspicuous participator on the Carolingian side in the Vienne campaigns, and his proprietary monastery of St-Julien, Brioude, dated charters according to Charles the Fat's regnal years even after his own and the king's death.⁹⁰ It was in this region that he intervened as *marchio* on behalf of the church of Lyon in June 885 along with the archchancellor Liutward, an association which must place him at the heart of the newly-expanded imperial court.⁹¹ Presumably it was his support for the Carolingians in 879-80 which had allowed him to extend his authority into some of the areas which had previously been Boso's domain.

Finally, the case of the third *marchio*, Berengar of Friuli, can help us cast a clearer light on the way these big men operated in their localities in relation to the

⁸⁶ Poupardin, *Bourgogne*, p.10 n.1; DD RB, Introduction, p.6 n.4.

⁸⁷ Dhondt, *Études*, pp.241-2; Auzias, *L'Aquitaine*, p.423; D CIII 123 for Bernard as 'illustrissimus marchio', one of only two uses of this superlative by Charles's chancery. He only ever issued charters as *comes*; Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', p.226.

⁸⁸ Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', pp.225-7.

⁸⁹ Auzias, *L'Aquitaine*, pp.389-99; see also Lauranson-Rosaz, 'Roi', pp.418-21.

⁹⁰ Auzias, *L'Aquitaine*, pp.418, 541-8; AB s.a. 880, p.243; Nelson, *Annals*, p.221 n.9. See also c.3.3, n.51.

⁹¹ D CIII 123.

king.⁹² In northern Italian political terminology, the term *marchio* had an even longer history as an appellation for a leading royal representative than it did north of the Alps.⁹³ There is ample evidence to make concrete this connection between Berengar and the king. He is to be found at the side of Charles in Italy as early as 875, when Louis the German sent his son across the Alps to secure the succession to Louis II against Charles the Bald,⁹⁴ and was the instrument of his attempts to establish his rule in Spoleto.⁹⁵ He is listed immediately after the king in a catalogue of witnesses and adjudicators to a royal judgement in 881, he was in a position to obtain royal favours for his followers, and he was closely associated with Liutward early in 882.⁹⁶ The strong links forged between Berengar and the kingdoms of the north, which were to stand him in good stead later on in his struggle with Guy of Spoleto, can only have been made stronger by his connections with Charles the Fat, and vice versa.⁹⁷ The evidence of this, and a demonstration of how king, *marchiones*, and *comites* related to each other before and after 888 is provided by a glance at the careers of certain Lombard aristocrats in the 880s, the period during which they fell under Berengar's influence, first as *marchio* and then as king. The count Berardus, for example, who came from Italy to help Charles the Fat and his Carolingian allies clean up the aftermath of the rebellion of Boso in 882 seems to have been also a man of Berengar, later supplying him with 300 men in the struggle with Wido.⁹⁸ Berengar's brother-in-law and ally count Adalgisus II of Piacenza was a comital appointee of Charles the Fat.⁹⁹ Charles's *missus* count Adalroch was listed among the *fideles* of Berengar's father and predecessor Eberhard of Friuli.¹⁰⁰ Count Erardus was in Charles's entourage in 881, and in Berengar's in 888.¹⁰¹ The celebrated Suppo II, Adalgisus's father, also had well-documented links to both king and *marchio*

⁹² DD CIII 31 and 48 call him 'marchio'. D 37 calls him 'Berengarius dux et affinitate nobis coniunctum.' All three charters date from 881-2.

⁹³ Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', p.324.

⁹⁴ Andreas, *Historia*, pp.229-30.

⁹⁵ BC s.a.883, p.110; cf. below, c.6.6.2. BC s.a.887 p.115 implies he was out of favour for a short time at the start of that year.

⁹⁶ DD CIII 31, 37, 48.

⁹⁷ Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, esp. pp.77-8.

⁹⁸ AV s.a. 882, p.52; *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris*, p.376; Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, pp.147-8.

⁹⁹ Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, p.112 and n.4.

¹⁰⁰ D CIII 25; Schramm and Mutherich, *Denkmale*, pp.93-4; Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, p.113.

¹⁰¹ D CIII 35; *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris*, p.379; Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, pp.175-6.

before he died in 883.¹⁰² Finally, Count Waltfred of Verona was a major supporter of Berengar before 896, his 'summus consiliarius' and successor in Friuli.¹⁰³ In the 880s, this connection was already clear, as was his place in the high favour of emperor Charles, who called him and Berengar his 'dilecti fideles et consilarii.'¹⁰⁴

These pieces of evidence give some more substance to the notion of the *marchio* as a royal representative governing a multiplicity of lesser counts. In Berengar's case we can name several of these counts, observe their allegiance and value to both *marchio* and king, and take note of the fact that some of them are reported to have led large numbers of men, in the case of Adalgisus 1500, into battle on their lord's behalf. The fact that these men remained consistently loyal to Berengar after 888 is surely testament partly to the strength of the bonds he established with them as a result of being named *marchio* by Charles in the 880s. Certainly we should envisage command of similarly clustered and numerous counts being delegated to the other *marchiones* Bernard and Rudolf, although the evidence is sparser. As well as Liutfrid, Turimbert and Manasses were counts in the following of Rudolf of Burgundy,¹⁰⁵ and there seems to have been something like a vicecomital dynasty in the service of Bernard Plantevelue's family.¹⁰⁶ In the case of Odo it can be speculated with some confidence that he was never given this epithet not because, as Brunner suggested, he rejected royal authority,¹⁰⁷ but on the contrary because he held multiple counties personally rather than being placed at the head of a series of others'.¹⁰⁸ It could also be argued in support of this argument that by this point the military core of the Neustrian march was not in fact any particular county but the holdings of the monastery of St-Martin Tours, of which Odo was of course lay abbot.¹⁰⁹ In military terms he was probably appointed by Charles in response to the leadership vacuum created by the fall of Hugh the Abbot and then the Saxon *dux* Henry, who both died in 886. Henry, formerly the leading general of Louis the Younger, seems to have held some sort

¹⁰² Eg. D CIII 25; Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, pp.269-72.

¹⁰³ DD BF 4, 6, 8; Hlawitschka, *Oberitalien*, pp. 279-81.

¹⁰⁴ D CIII 32; see also D 31.

¹⁰⁵ DD RB 2, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Poly, *Provence*, p.19 and n.70.

¹⁰⁷ Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', p.276.

¹⁰⁸ See Favre, *Eudes*, pp.12-6. He was certainly count of Paris, Angers, Tours and Orléans.

¹⁰⁹ Werner, 'Robertiens', pp.22-3.

of general responsibility for defence against the Vikings in Charles's empire, including Neustria.¹¹⁰ It was only on his fall that the emperor came to relieve and reorganise Paris in person, and his death was recorded with the observation that he was 'marchensi Francorum, qui in id tempus Niustriam tenuit.'¹¹¹ There are no east Frankish royal charters at all mentioning Henry with which to check his status in the eyes of the court, but his designation here as *marchio* seems to imply again a command over counts, although this time on a mobile and military basis rather than in the sense of a more territorial command. It was partly to fill Henry's boots that Odo received his grant in 886.

Here, then, is one answer to the question of how Charles the Fat tried to govern this sprawling accumulation of *regna*, especially after 885. We should see these four imperial aristocrats, Odo, Rudolf, Bernard and Berengar, as his appointed representatives in various coherent regions of the empire, in a role perhaps analogous to non-royal subkings. Yes, the chosen men were already members of families with land and power in these areas, and the centres of their authority were traditional, the heartlands of areas defined by geography and the outcome of more or less recent political history; Friuli, St-Martin Tours, St-Maurice d'Againe, Lyon and the Auvergne. But what mattered was their personal relationship with the emperor: if the aristocracy as a whole was not a monolith, then equally nor were individual families like the Welfs or Unruochings. The *marchiones* did not somehow 'represent' these families as elements of a 'rising aristocracy'. Indeed, their power under Charles was legitimate and perceived by all parties as delegated. This is what they received from the king; there are less tangible but equally important ways than in terms of material wealth for aristocrats to relate to kings. A Dhondtian description of the growth of their families' lands throughout the eighth and ninth centuries is insufficient to explain the nature of their position in the 880s. Staring straight at the localities, at Odo's Neustrian connections for example, must give only a blurred image, which can only be seen clearly by observing it through the filter of the court. 'Power' should not be

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.21; Brunner, 'Fürstentitel', pp.275, 305-6, 309.

¹¹¹ BC s.a. 886, p.114; military role also implied by AV s.a.886, p.59, 'dux Austrasiorum'; and Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.126 who records his literary epitaph, 'Saxonibus, Francis, Fresonibus ille triarchos prefuit.'

though of as a single and finite commodity competed for by mutually antagonistic groups. Royal and 'local' power formed parts of a coherent whole, and their mutual reliance is not diminished by the kind of latitude we have observed in its exercise in the case of Odo, who was not afraid to step on the toes of lesser aristocratic figures in his area. The emperor did not, could not, regularly intervene directly below the level of the high aristocracy. His claim to authority over the *marchiones* was nevertheless important, as it not only mediated his authority to the localities, but also created a bond of mutual reliance between him and them: and they did, as we have seen, travel long distances to appear at court and contribute to imperial ceremonies and campaigns throughout the reign. They were part of a political structure which, in the face of the problems of governing a huge territory beset by Viking, Slav and Saracen raids, was expedient and tailored to the circumstances of the 880s. This was an attempted solution to the problem of ruling the supposedly anachronistic empire of Charlemagne from bases in Alemannia and Italy.

It would be misleading to suggest that Charles attempted to neatly blanket his empire with a patchwork of territorial lordships, but it would seem likely that there were probably other magnates for whom a similar role was envisaged. One was Arnulf, who was placed in control of the Carinthian/Pannonian march.¹¹² We can only assume that William the Pious filled the shoes of his father Bernard Plantevelue. The house monastery of St-Julien, Brioude, continued to date charters according to the rule of the emperor after the latter's death, and although a royal charter calling him *marchio* is a forgery, the appellation may recall a position he actually filled.¹¹³ Julia Smith has argued that Charles the Fat also made a very typical Carolingian contract of subordination with Alan I of Brittany at the farthest extreme of his empire.¹¹⁴ Alan's self-styling 'rex' implies that his position was that of a royal client, and the king in question is hinted at by a diploma of 897X900 which was issued by Alan in part for the salvation of a

¹¹² See c.6.3.

¹¹³ Auzias, *L'Aquitaine*, pp.418, 541-8; D CIII 186. Bishop Geilo of Langres may also have been active in this area after 886: see c.5.3.3.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Province*, pp.192-3.

Karolus.¹¹⁵ Smith's argument that this is more likely to refer back to Charles the Fat than Charles the Simple is convincing, since the latter had little or no influence in Neustrian politics, and the former is reported to have had sympathetic dealings with important figures in eastern Brittany.¹¹⁶ This can be viewed, as Smith points out, not simply as reflecting Charles's wish to be seen as acting in the political traditions of west Frankish kingship, but as a display of hegemony appropriate to an emperor. A final example of a subordinate ruler acting as a local representative within the empire is provided by the Viking *dux* Godafrid. He was set up in Frisia with a Carolingian bride as a buffer against further invasions in 882, and remained loyal for three years until he lost his life thanks to the failure of the 885 rebellion in which he participated with Hugh of Lotharingia.¹¹⁷

Charles the Fat therefore elected to tackle the problems of ruling an extended realm by establishing personal relationships with selected 'big men' who were then expected to take over certain provinces on the emperor's behalf and administer them more or less without direct royal intervention. This method of transmitting Carolingian authority was by no means new or anomalous. Charles the Bald, as is well known, governed the west Frankish kingdom by establishing a similar type of territorial magnate commands to those we have been discussing.¹¹⁸ Charles the Simple, in turn, did the same.¹¹⁹ Charles the Fat's own youth, during which he and his brothers were set up as the principal intermediate figures representing the king in defined *regna*, may also have provided inspiration. It is perhaps valid to think of Charles's measures as formalising the *marchiones*' position: it may be no coincidence that the first use of the term in an east Frankish narrative source dates from his reign.¹²⁰ This setup ought not, however, to be interpreted in terms of royal concessions to 'the aristocracy', but should rather be seen as practical solutions to the problems imposed by the limited logistics of governing Europe in the ninth century. In some ways, the Frankish empire lent

¹¹⁵ D Ang 12.

¹¹⁶ *La Chronique de Nantes*, c.21, pp.66-7. He provided refuge for the bishop of Nantes.

¹¹⁷ AFC s.a.882, 883, pp.98-100, p.98 stating that Charles 'Gotafridum...consortem regni constituit'; Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.882 pp.119-20.

¹¹⁸ Airlie, 'Aristocracy', pp.448-9.

¹¹⁹ Ehlers, 'Anfänge', pp.22-3; Werner, 'Westfranken-Frankreich', pp.738-40.

¹²⁰ AFC s.a.886, p.114 (referring to Henry); see Werner, 'Missus', p.216, n.96.

itself to this sort of structuring, as a more or less loose agglomeration of *regna*.¹²¹ To give but one clear example, the Breton march, although its focus did change over time, formed a quite coherent body of *honores* which could easily be assigned to a single overseer, a position filled at various times in the second half of the ninth century by Robert the Strong, Louis the Stammerer, Hugh the Abbot and Odo of Paris. Indeed, the evidence for the governmental practices of earlier kings such as Charlemagne and Louis the Pious points in a similar direction: these rulers usually preferred to deal directly with only one or two important counts in a locality, or with a *missus dominicus*, who would then pass on orders and information to their fellows and subordinates.¹²² The position of the *marchio* Gerold in the 790s is instructive: he was simultaneously Charlemagne's appointed representative in Bavaria and a leading member of the Agilolfing dynasty which had controlled that *regnum* during the eighth century.¹²³ There was no contradiction here: the interplay of local influence and central appointment was crucial to the effectiveness of men like Gerold, and central to the structures of early medieval politics in general.¹²⁴

In other words, Carolingian kings and emperors had always been accustomed to dealing with powerful aristocratic individuals, and not with the 'aristocracy' as a monolithic entity. While these people's status may have derived from the powerful position of their families, these families did not form corporate groups which had to be negotiated with *en masse*. As Werner demonstrated for ninth-century Neustria, the substrata of local aristocracies could remain substantially stable over relatively long periods of time.¹²⁵ The key role of kings in this regard was thus to appoint men they thought they could trust to govern these regions in the name of Carolingian authority. In this sense, the dynasty's authority had always had a 'supervisory', rather than bureaucratic, character.¹²⁶ The real strength of Carolingian power was the dynasty's construction and

¹²¹ The work of Werner is important here: see most recently 'Völker'.

¹²² Innes, 'Processes', pp.260, 296.

¹²³ Werner, 'Families', p.166.

¹²⁴ A similar process is evident in tenth-century England under Athelstan, who reduced the number of ealdormen and enlarged their territorial responsibilities as a response to the challenges of ruling a newly-expanded realm: see, for instance, Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, p.172.

¹²⁵ Werner, 'Untersuchungen IV'; Airlie, 'Aristocracy', p.435.

¹²⁶ Rosenwein, 'Politics', p.249.

maintenance of the 'political myth' that they alone could be kings:¹²⁷ this idea could only be strengthened by the exercise of power in the localities by men who claimed to be wielding it in the name of the king. As we have seen, if men like Odo did make self-interested decisions on affairs in the localities which did not refer to direct royal orders, we should not assume that kings like Charles were worried. As long as Odo and his ilk brought forces to help on campaigns and kept appearing at court, which they clearly did, then the Carolingian system was still working.

In these ways the political structures of the reign of Charles the Fat sit quite firmly within the traditions of Carolingian kingship. This observation also stands true for some of the more familiar agencies of ninth-century government. The standard accounts of Carolingian administration are focused very strongly on the earlier period, and peter out in the 860s, if not earlier, as the supply of capitularies dries up.¹²⁸ This imbalance can give the misleading impression that the empire was all but ungoverned in the later part of the century. Nevertheless, there are other signs that traditional forms of Carolingian government did not completely die out after the reign of Charles the Bald. While no east Frankish capitularies survive from the ninth century, we know from references in the annals that both Louis the German and Charles the Fat did issue them.¹²⁹ In addition, the earlier capitularies which had provided for the establishment and maintenance of the Carolingian programme were still being copied and read in the late ninth century: their pronouncements were not intended to be relevant only to the specific circumstances of their original promulgation.¹³⁰ Royal *missi* were certainly active throughout the empire in the 880s, sometimes on missions we are able to define quite accurately.¹³¹ The fact that this is rarely acknowledged by

¹²⁷ Airlie, 'Semper'.

¹²⁸ Eg. Werner, 'Missus'. Most studies are concerned almost exclusively with Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: Halphen, *Charlemagne*, book 1 c.6; McKitterick, *Kingdoms*, c.4; Riché, *Carolingians*, part II c.5

¹²⁹ AF s.a.852, pp.42-3 (on which see Reuter, *Germany*, pp.84-6); AFC s.a.882, p.99.

¹³⁰ Mordek, *Bibliotheca*, p.714 is one of many examples of early-ninth century capitularies preserved in late-ninth century manuscripts. Copies of some of Charlemagne's and of Louis the Pious's capitularies were present in the St-Gall library in the 880s: Lehmann, *Bibliothekskataloge*, p.79.

¹³¹ DD CIII 1, 17, 23a, 25, 75, 158, Anhang 1. D 75 is a good example of a specific mission carried out by presumably local men, D 23a of a more representative mission given to higher

historians of Carolingian government is in part due to their emphasis on the paucity of surviving late-ninth century prescriptive sources; in fact, the charter evidence shows that the supposed absence of traditional forms of rule in this period is at least in part more apparent than real, a trick of the evidential light.

If Charles the Fat ought therefore to be seen tackling the challenge of governing the empire in largely the same way as his predecessors, this is not to say that the outcome was an unqualified success. His main problem stemmed from the succession situation. With the proliferation of kings after about 875, when a new and populous generation of Carolingians began to take on the task of ruling the empire, the *regna* became much more intensively governed than previously. With smaller areas of responsibility, kings were able to intervene more directly in the local patronage networks which ran through the aristocracy. For the aristocrats, this was an opportunity to enhance their standing by making best use of this new *Königsnähe*. However, as the Carolingians of this generation one by one met their early deaths and the kingdoms of the empire fell into the hands of Charles the Fat, this situation was reversed, and once more access to the royal ear became limited, available only to those with the favour of an often distant emperor.¹³² The dilution of *Königsnähe* was exacerbated by Charles's lack of a legitimate heir whom he could set up as a subking. The position of the *marchiones* therefore became especially significant in representing imperial authority. This state of affairs did not undermine Charles's position *per se*, but it did mean that the resolution of the succession issue came to be of paramount importance. As long as the identity of the empire's next ruler remained uncertain, anxiety would develop in the minds of the members of the aristocratic community, who needed reassurances as to where the source of *Königsnähe* would lie in future. Ultimately, it was this conjunction of circumstances which gave Arnulf his constituency for support in the coup of 887.

These matters will be discussed at greater length in chapter 6. However, it is important to stress in conclusion to this chapter that the reign of Charles the Fat clearly did not witness a definitive shift in the balance of power away from the

magnates. These are just the references in the royal charters: other *missi* are attested in the local charters and in the formulaary evidence. See also below, c.6.6.4.

¹³² Innes, *State*, pp.223-4.

king and in favour of the aristocracy. Even rebellious aristocrats were not attempting to opt out of the Carolingian system, but rather to acquire *more Königsnähe*. All the evidence points to the fact that the relationship between the two remained cast in a mould which had been more or less the same throughout the ninth century. In reality, the so-called 'territorial aristocracy' did not 'rise': it had always been a powerful force in Frankish politics which rulers had always taken account of. Charles the Fat's authority may not have been absolute or omnipresent, but then neither had Charles the Great's.

After we have registered their existence, how can we assess the success of Charles the Fat's delegated commands? We cannot really say if they would have become heritable, Dhondt's yardstick, as the emperor died before that could be tested. However, neither Odo nor Bernard Plantevelue had genuinely inherited their respective bases from their fathers. Charles the Fat had organised something on the basis of expediency. It was only his premature downfall at a time when there was no adult male Carolingian to assume his position that crystallised this contingent organisation, not the inevitable build up of aristocratic house properties over a hundred or more years. The key factor was not a long process, but a single event. In fact, a measure of the king's success lies exactly in the fact that these property accumulations formed the cores of the post-888 *regna* within the territorial extent of the empire, Dhondt's criterion of failure. Rudolf of Burgundy, for example, was not, as Regino thought, drawn from the bowels of his kingdom.¹³³ He was a relative newcomer who only became established in the transjuran area in the 870s, the very period in which Charles the Fat himself was beginning to exert influence in the region. Capetian royal power, when it eventually emerged, would be based on the foundations of Paris and Neustria which had been united in their hands by Charles's 886 grant to Odo. The careers of Odo, Rudolf and all the other *reguli* were either created, endorsed or strengthened by Charles, and their post-888 position can only be explained fully in light of their pre-888 relationship to the emperor. The underlying structures of his empire endured, and under the same men.¹³⁴ In this sense, even more than that of

¹³³ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a. 888, p.129.

¹³⁴ See also Werner, 'Genèse'; Airlie, 'Aristocracy', p.449.

Louis the Younger, it was the court of Charles the Fat which propelled the dynastic lines of Rudolf, Berengar, Bernard, Odo and Henry towards their royal and ducal destinies.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ For Louis, see Fried, *Ludwig*, pp.12-3.

5: CHARLES THE FAT AND THE WEST FRANKISH KINGDOM, 885-8

5.1: 'A forgotten king'

The succession of Charles the Fat to the west Frankish kingdom of Carloman II in 885 was a significant event in contemporary eyes, reuniting as it did Charlemagne's empire to its full territorial extent and giving substance to the Carolingian conception of a unity articulated by the relationship between members of the dynastic family.¹ The coincidence of this territory and the emperor's name and status were certainly too much for the likes of Notker the Stammerer to resist, and the affinity between Charlemagne and his great-grandson is one of the clearest underlying themes of his *Gesta Karoli*, written around this time at the monastery of St-Gall.² But whatever symbolic weight Charles's succession may have carried for contemporaries in the year 885, modern historiography has tended to see Notker's positive connection as a negative one, and has generally condemned the reunification as anachronistic, the imposition of a false unity on *regna* which had been growing apart for decades, and a pointless delay of the emergence of the nascent kingdoms of France and Germany.³ 'Everything fell into his lap':⁴ the reunified empire was an accident, not an achievement. The implication, of course, is that it was ungovernable and doomed to failure from the outset.⁵

Perhaps as a result of this, Charles the Fat has been largely ignored as a king of France. Significantly, he is not usually numbered in the series of King Charleses of that country: Charles the Bald and Charles the Simple are, respectively, Charles II and III. For a further impression of this neglect, one can look at recent studies of particular regions in west Francia. McKitterick's article on the Carolingians and the church of Rheims between 882 and 987 mentions neither the *Visio Karoli*, probably produced under the supervision of archbishop Fulk in 890, nor the diplomatic evidence for Charles's patronage of the see.⁶ Similarly, Sassier declines to take his examination of ninth-century royal relations

¹ See in general Wallace-Hadrill, 'Prince', pp.178-9; Penndorf, *Problem*.

² See below, c.7.

³ The 'rise of France and Germany' argument is much more common in the French and Anglophone literature than in the German.

⁴ Reuter, *Germany*, p.117.

⁵ Eg. Brühl, *Fodrum*, pp.35-6 ('a mere intermezzo'); McKitterick, *Kingdoms*, p.262 ('a temporary cobbling together').

with the church of Auxerre beyond the death of Charles the Bald, maintaining without substantiation that from that point on Carolingian influence waned and local power was allowed to develop unchecked.⁷ In fact, Charles the Fat did issue charters for Auxerre, and Hugh ‘the Abbot’ of St-Germain was prominent in his military following in the 880s.⁸

For modern historians, therefore, Charles the Fat is very much ‘un roi de France oublié.’⁹ However, as we saw in the previous chapter, his authority was recognised in the western kingdom. Moreover, his reunification of the empire was actually greeted with some optimism by contemporaries. Regino, for instance, thought Charles to have been a ‘christianissimus princeps’, whose place in heaven was signalled partly by the very fact ‘ut omnia regna Francorum, quae predecessores sui non sine sanguinis effusione cum magno labore adquisierant, ipse perfacile in brevi temporum spatio sine conflictu, nullo contradicente, possidenda perceperit.’¹⁰ The empire had not, in Regino’s view, fallen into Charles’s lap: rather, his acquisition of the west and the other *regna* had been a clever move, achieved peacefully and without the spilling of blood. Significantly, the annalist of St-Vaast, the only major contemporary western chronicler still writing at the time of his death, believed, like Regino, that the emperor had taken up a place in heaven.¹¹

This chapter will seek to assess in what ways Charles sought to articulate his authority in the western kingdom, and to what extent these were a success. West Francia provides a useful case study with which to cast further light on some of the same issues as were discussed in the previous chapter, partly because of the quantity and quality of the evidence which survives from Charles’s two and a half year reign there, and partly because it is often assumed to be the *regnum* where the emperor’s authority was least heeded. This study will discuss the circumstances of his succession and reign in the west, and ask whether his attempts to rule it were as anachronistic and doomed to failure as has been asserted, or whether the

⁶ McKitterick, ‘Carolingian Kings’, esp. p.229 with n.8. D CIII 106 was issued for the church of Rheims. On the *Visio* see below, cc.6.5 and 8.

⁷ Sassier, ‘Carolingiens’, esp. p.34.

⁸ D CIII 145. See c.5.3.1 on Hugh the Abbot.

⁹ Werner, ‘Robertiens’, p.20. Werner is an exception; as is Theis, *Héritage*, pp.117-20.

¹⁰ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.888, pp.128-9.

approval voiced by Regino and the annalist of St-Vaast was more than a mere rhetorical flourish.

5.2: The succession of 885

On 6 December 884 the king of west Francia Carloman II was killed whilst hunting in the forêt de Lyons.¹² His accidental death (opinion was divided as to whether the fatal injury had been caused by an irate boar or a misplaced sword)¹³ at the tender age of 18 was just the latest in a series of grave misfortunes to strike at the top of the Carolingian house after 875. The demise in successive years of the elder statesmen Louis II of Italy, Louis the German and Charles the Bald opened the door to what must have seemed to be the start of a new generation of kings at the head of European affairs; this generation, however, was very soon all but wiped out by a bewildering mixture of illness and misadventure. From Louis the Stammerer in 879 to Carloman in 884, five Carolingian kings met premature deaths, and left no legitimate male heirs to succeed them. The mood of optimism which had inspired the author of the poem *Ludwigslied* to enthuse about the bellicose qualities of the vigorous Louis III must have turned to disbelief when the heroic king met a bizarre death after attempting to chase a girl into a house, apparently forgetting that he was on horseback at the time.¹⁴ And to anyone who had shared the renewed hope of Hincmar of Rheims in the promise of Carloman II, a hope which inspired the archbishop to revise for him the famous *De Ordine Palatii*, the outcome of the royal hunt in winter 884 must have been extremely dispiriting. Although no source goes so far as to read the dynasty's bad luck as an expression of divine judgement, the thought must have passed through some minds as the renewed Viking onslaught battered the shores of northern Europe and the descent line of Charles the Bald started grinding to an abrupt and unexpected halt.

Whether or not such gloomy uncertainties were entertained in the minds of contemporaries, at the end of 884 Charles the Fat was, as the only adult male

¹¹ AV s.a.887, p.64.

¹² Confusion over date and place resolved by Bautier in the introduction to DD C2, pp.liv-lvi.

¹³ AV s.a.884, p.55; AFC s.a.884, p.101; Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.884, pp.121-2.

¹⁴ AV s.a.882, p.52

legitimate Carolingian still alive, the obvious candidate to succeed Carloman.

In addition, despite entering middle age (he was 45) and himself still lacking a legitimate male heir, Charles had by this time proven himself to be a mobile and experienced king and emperor. He had been involved in west Frankish politics since the early 870s, and had had a close political relationship with both Louis III and Carloman II following the Vienne campaign of 880. As well as this, his selection as king ahead of the Louis the Stammerer's third son Charles the Simple was a reflection of the state of west Frankish politics in 884-5. The main factor in the overlooking of Charles the Simple must have been his youth (he was 5), which rendered him unsuitable to lead armies against the Northmen: in 888 Fulk of Rheims would explicitly give this as the reason why the young Charles was passed over for a second time.¹⁵ Effective royal leadership of multi-regnal armies was often most significant by its absence; in 872, for example, the Thuringians and Saxons had quarrelled and fled in disarray before the Moravians because Louis the German was not there.¹⁶ Kings who were ascending the throne for the first time in this period frequently made a virtue out of the necessity of defence against the Vikings as a factor in their own election.¹⁷ And although minors had succeeded in such circumstances before (Louis III and Carloman II themselves) and would do so again (Louis of Provence), the situation was especially serious in 884-5. As the price for their retreat, the Vikings at Amiens had already extracted a phenomenal 12,000 pounds of gold and silver from Carloman, and were now claiming that the king's death released them from their part of the bargain. The new king, whoever he might be, would have to renew the tribute.¹⁸ In the winter of 884-5, then, the uneasy aristocratic communities of the west Frankish kingdom required a leader with the military and political resources to meet this immediate threat. Charles the Fat, of course, had faced an almost exactly similar situation some two years previously, when he had used a mixture of force and diplomacy to see off the Danish armies from their encampment at Asselt. Moreover, the west Frankish problem was now also

¹⁵ Flodoard, *Historia*, IV.5, p.563.

¹⁶ AF s.a.872, p.75-6

¹⁷ Boso: *Conventus Mantalensis*; Louis of Provence: *Hludowicus Regis Arelatensis Electio*.

¹⁸ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.884, p.122; AV s.a.884, p.55; AFC s.a.884, pp.101-2.

Charles's, because the Danes had retreated to Leuven in Lotharingia, within the boundaries of his own realm.

Our best source for the west Frankish reaction to Carloman's death is the contemporary and local annalist of St-Vaast. The 'Franci', says the annalist, after 'capiunt consilium', sent Count Theoderic of Vermandois to Italy to invite Charles to come to Francia.¹⁹ Theoderic represented an influential group of magnates from the Paris area ('Francia' proper) who had been close to Carloman II, and had been in a position to orchestrate the dead king's funeral at St-Denis.²⁰ As a result, they had access to the west Frankish regalia, the clothing, crown, sceptre and sword with which Charles the Bald had passed on the *regnum* to Louis the Stammerer, and which in turn became the property of Louis III and, presumably, Carloman II.²¹ This gear had evidently become a necessary accoutrement to legitimate kingship in the western kingdom, and so was probably passed on by Theoderic to Charles the Fat.

On the strength of the report in the *Annales Vedastini*, it appears that the invitation was sent out immediately after Carloman's death, and indeed probably before the end of 884. Charles seems, moreover, to have received Theoderic, or at least his message, by February 885 at the latest, for it is on the 15th of that month that we find him issuing an interesting charter in favour of Vodelgis, *fidelis* of the *marchio* Rudolf.²² This document was probably issued at Pavia, and can hence be connected with the emperor's preparations to cross the main route over the Mons Iovis pass from Pavia to Transjurane Burgundy, where Vodelgis and Rudolf had their influence, and then on to the west. The gift concerns the transfer of considerable properties in the tranjurane area *in proprietatem*. It is quite likely that Vodelgis was to be in charge of provisioning the imperial entourage as it crossed the Alps and the Jura, and that the properties granted, which were

¹⁹ AV s.a.884, p.56. For the identification of this Theoderic see Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', p.102 with n.59; idem, 'Gauzlin', p.446, n.150a.

²⁰ Bautier's introduction to DD C2, pp. lv-lvi, lxiv; and his comments at D 79.

²¹ AB s.a.877, pp.218-9; 879, pp.234-5.

²² D CIII 112. Vodelgis later passed on the gift to the church of Lausanne: D RB 7.

clustered round Yverdon by the main route northwest to Langres via Orbe, were intended to help him do so.²³

Charles was therefore preparing to make his way west already in February 885. Nevertheless, he did not actually enter the western kingdom itself until mid-June, when he received the submissions of the west Frankish aristocracy at Ponthion.²⁴ Already prior to this, however, he was issuing charters as 'rex in Gallia'. In other words, the 'constitutive' act of Charles's accession to the west in the eyes of the court was neither his reception of the aristocrats' invitation in early 885, nor his reception of their formal submission in June, but rather some other event in between. What may that event have been?

The first charters issued by Charles as 'rex in Gallia' were enacted at Grand in Lotharingia on 20 May 885, and there are no fewer than three of them.²⁵ This is an unusually high number of charters to be enacted on one day by Charles, or indeed by any Carolingian, and they reveal the presence of several members of the high aristocracy, including Askericus, bishop-elect of Paris, the *marchio* Rudolf, and Wibod, bishop of Parma.²⁶ A large and important assembly was clearly in progress. The circumstances suggest that it may well have been a consecration ceremony. Consecration, on which Carolingian kingship had always been predicated, had by this time become an established component of king-making ceremonies west of the Rhine. Moreover, 20 May 885 was the feast of the Ascension, an eminently appropriate day and quite in keeping with Carolingian use of the sacred calendar to make political statements.²⁷ Grand itself was also a symbolic venue. It was one of the biggest Roman amphitheatres anywhere in the former empire, as well as an important late-Roman religious site.²⁸ Equally interesting is the fact that two of the three charters were issued on the intervention

²³ For Charles's speedy journey west across Lombardy, see DD CIII 110-5; AFC s.a.884, p.101; BC s.a.884, 885, p.113. Charles may well have sent his invitation to the pope to come and legitimise Bernard during this stay at Pavia.

²⁴ AV s.a.885, p.56. D CIII 122 was issued at Ponthion on June 16; D 121 at Toul on June 12.

²⁵ DD CIII 116-8. For the place, convincingly refuting Kehr's tentative identification of Granges, see Bautier, 'Diplômes', p.220 with n.39.

²⁶ Askericus: D CIII 116. The presence of Wibod is made probable by his reception of D 115 (issued at Pavia in April) and D 126 (issued at Etrepy in June). Rudolf: D 116. Although Rudolf is not called *marchio* here, the term was used inconsistently in royal charters and often substituted with *comes*, as Ehlers, 'Anfänge', pp.22-3 shows.

²⁷ Sierck, *Festtag*, p.95.

²⁸ Billoret, 'Grand'.

of Bishop Geilo of Langres, in whose diocese Grand lay. Intervention formulas are a good indicator of who was 'in' and 'out' at court at any given point: Geilo was, therefore, already enjoying privileged proximity to his new king's ear, and was mediating royal access on this very occasion. The bishop was no stranger to the procedures of kingmaking: in 879 he had participated in the assembly at Mantaille which had elevated Boso of Vienne to royal status, and in 888 he would consecrate Guy of Spoleto to the west Frankish kingdom, again in the diocese of Langres.²⁹ Moreover, Geilo and his diocese would go on to dominate the provision of commemoration of Charles's consecration which was established at the behest of the court later in 885.³⁰ It seems likely, taking all these factors into account, that Geilo anointed Charles as king at Grand on 20 May 885. This would explain why Charles began to style himself 'rex in Gallia' at this point, rather than before or afterwards.

From Charles's point of view Grand was a location chiming with imperial echoes, an ideal forum for the parading of some newly-acquired regalia and for stressing the legitimacy of his rule. However, we must further ask ourselves for whose eyes this performance was intended. The primary audience must have been Lotharingian. The annalist of St-Vaast, when describing the people who came to subject themselves to the new king at Ponthion in June, uses the phrase 'omnes qui fuerant in regno Karlomanni.'³¹ This annalist was very sensitive to what might be called the 'regality' of the Frankish empire, that is to say that he usually took care to distinguish between different *regna*.³² In particular he consistently drew a distinction between the 'regnum Karlomanni' and the 'regnum Hlotharii', something on which he was perhaps particularly qualified to talk about since Arras, where St-Vaast was, had been put in a peculiar position after the treaty of Verdun, as an island of Lotharingian control in the kingdom of Charles the Bald. The political identity of the middle kingdom under Lothar I and his namesake son had solidified at least enough to leave this residue in the language of political geography, and in 885 the 'regnum Hlotharii' was once again united under a

²⁹ *Conventus Mantalensis*, p.369.

³⁰ DD CIII 129, 147 and 153. See below, c.6.4.

³¹ AV s.a.885, p.56.

³² Ehlers, 'Anfänge', pp.27-8.

single ruler, something the annalist may have wished to emphasise. Indeed, he reports Charles's first command at Ponthion as the new king in exactly these terms; 'praecipiens eos qui erant ex regno quondam Hlotharii et regno Karlomanni pergere Luvanio contra Nortmannos.'³³ But it was only the men of the 'regnum Karlomanni' who had come to Ponthion in order to 'se subsidere.' Charles must, therefore, have already talked to and received the commendations of the representatives of the 'regnum Hlotharii', and in a different place from those of the 'regnum Karlomanni'.³⁴

Grand lay right on the line which divided Lotharingia into east and west, and was hence an ideal place for the gathering of those Lotharingians who mattered. By virtue of this fact, it also emphasised Charles's assumption of direct control of Lotharingia. As discussed in chapter 3, the emperor had an established claim to the *regnum's* eastern half, but had delegated control of the western portion to Louis III and then to Carloman II. While he did retain the right to distribute *honores* there, there is no sign that he formally took the magnates of Lotharingia into his commendation, or that he even visited the western region at all before 885. There may therefore have been a degree of ambiguity in the eyes of the aristocracy about the exact nature of his rule in Lotharingia up to this point, an ambiguity which the consecration of 20 May was meant to eradicate. It is possible that even more specific considerations influenced the choice of venue. Hugh, the illegitimate son of Lothar II, had been an intermittent thorn in the Carolingians' side since the 870s as he attempted to acquire his paternal kingdom, and he had proved capable of attracting the support in this venture of a number of significant Lotharingian magnates.³⁵ In 885, moreover, Hugh's latest revolt was gathering momentum, set off by the opening of new opportunities to him caused

³³ AV s.a.885, p.56; similar references at 879, p.45; 882, p.52; 884, p.55; 895, p.75. 896, p.77 for a distinction between 'Francia' and the land 'supra Mosellam'.

³⁴ This hypothesis is given indirect support by Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.884, p.122, who states that Charles's reception of the magnates took place at Gondreville in Lotharingia, rather than at Ponthion; this backs up the idea that there were two assemblies (Regino is more interested in the one which took place in Lotharingia, the annalist of St-Vaast in the west Frankish one). Gondreville is only about 20 miles from Grand; Regino may have referred to the palace in which Charles stayed at the time of his consecration, rather to the actual site of the consecration itself. DD CIII 119 and 120 seem to place Charles at Gondreville shortly after the assembly at Grand, but the documents are probably later forgeries: Bautier, 'Diplômes', p.220, n.39.

³⁵ On his supporters see Parisot, *Lorraine*, pp.478-9; Hlawitschka, *Lotharingen*, pp.164-7.

by the death of Carloman II.³⁶ Grand lay in the heartlands of Hugh's support. After his rebellion failed, he himself was captured at Gondreville, the Carolingian palace which lay only about 20 miles from the amphitheatre.³⁷ The assembly at Grand was therefore probably intended to make a statement about Charles's authority to Hugh's supporters in particular, as well as to the Lotharingian aristocracy as a whole.

The choice of date (the feast of Ascension) suggests that this ceremony was very carefully worked out in advance. The diplomatic evidence backs this up, as it shows that Geilo had the Grand charters drawn up by his scribes before the emperor arrived in his diocese.³⁸ This hypothesis also helps explain why Charles was keen to make peace with the rebel Guy of Spoleto before leaving the Italian kingdom for the west: Guy had strong political links in the Langres area, and the reestablishment of good relations with him was probably thought to be a wise prelude to the meeting with Geilo.³⁹ For all that consecration was by this point a more or less necessary ritual to undergo to make good a claim to west Frankish kingship, we can appreciate that Charles took great care to achieve the maximum political impact with the ceremony at Grand.

If the proceedings of this assembly were carefully orchestrated to make an impression on the Lotharingian nobility, it would appear that the consecration which took place there was intended to apply to Charles's west Frankish kingship as well. The term 'Gallia', which is used in Charles's charters to express his new position, could be taken in this period to refer to any one of a variety of political units. The fact that Charles issued charters for west Frankish as well as Lotharingian beneficiaries in the weeks before the assembly at Ponthion suggests that he used it to mean everything west of the Rhine.⁴⁰ What took place at Ponthion itself must therefore have been simply the formal submission of the west

³⁶ See below, c.6.4 for a full discussion.

³⁷ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, p.125.

³⁸ Bautier, 'Diplômes', p.220.

³⁹ For the reconciliation see AFC s.a.884, p.101; BC s.a.885, p.113. For Guy and Langres see D CIII 61. He was made king by Geilo in 888: AV s.a.888, p.64.

⁴⁰ DD CIII 117 and 118 are for monasteries in Dijon. For an analogy, the 848 consecration of Charles the Bald springs to mind: while this ceremony was designed to bolster the king's authority in Aquitaine, it also stood as Charles's anointing to the whole western kingdom; see Nelson, *Charles*, p.155.

Frankish nobles to the new king: the 'constitutive' act of his claim to direct rule of everything west of the Rhine was the anointing at Grand.

From here, some of the Lotharingians may have accompanied Charles to Ponthion, whence, as mentioned above, he despatched the two groups to deal with the Vikings encamped at Leuven. It is significant that this should have been the new king's first act, as indeed it had been when he succeeded Louis the Younger in 882 and set off to attack Asselt; the Viking threat, and specifically that posed by these particular Vikings, had been the reason for the invitation to him to assume the kingship in 885. In addition, it is notable that the army was multi-regnal, as had been the one led to Asselt in 882. As also in 884, when the Bavarians were sent off to attack the rebellious Guy in Italy, or in 886 at the siege of Paris,⁴¹ we can see the emperor able to deploy men from one part of his empire to go and deal with problems in another. This belies the idea that regnal boundaries were becoming fixed into national barriers at this time, and allows us to conceive of Charles the Fat's kingdoms as constituting a true 'empire' which could act with some cohesion in times of crisis.⁴² As 'rex in Gallia', then, Charles's first move was to send the men of *Gallia* on a joint venture together to defend against invaders who were threatening both their *regna*.

5.3: Charles's west Frankish supporters

The emperor was not a total newcomer in the west; his role there in the various toings and froings of the tense dynastic diplomacy of the 870s, and more recently his superior authority in western Lotharingia, ensured that he was by no means without contacts west of the Rhine. However, the germane criticism has been made that Charles was 'lacking a personal network of support in western Francia.'⁴³ This is an important point: Charles was in some ways a novelty among west Frankish rulers, a king who had come to rule the *regnum* of his cousins from unfamiliar heartlands across the Rhine and the Alps. Having considered the circumstances of Charles's succession, therefore, the next question to ask concerns

⁴¹ BC s.a.884, p.110; Abbo, *Bella*, p.90 for the scope of the Paris army.

⁴² The 'national' model is powerfully critiqued by Werner, 'Völker'; Arnold, *Germany*, pp.1-12. The evidence for manuscript circulation around the empire under Charles the Fat may also suggest a dissolution of boundaries after 885: Carroll, 'Archbishops', pp.111-3.

the nature and extent of his support in the west, a kingdom which he chose to rule, to all intents and purposes, as an absentee king. Who might actually have been present at Ponthion, and in what ways did they help him to assert his authority over his new kingdom?

Contemporary authors were somewhat more optimistic than modern historians on the question of Charles's supporters in the west. As we saw above, the *Annales Vedastini* said that he was attended at Ponthion by 'omnes qui fuerant in regno Karlomanni.'⁴⁴ Across the water from the monastery of St-Vaast, the royal biographer Asser, informed as ever on continental affairs, believed that Charles had taken over 'voluntario omnium consensu.'⁴⁵ On the face of it, it looks as if the monk of St-Vaast and the bishop of Sherborne probably exaggerated in order to promote an idealised image of a united community of aristocracy and ruler. Although Charles may have had good reasons for the brevity of his stay in the west on the occasion of his accession, it is conspicuous that the range of beneficiaries of imperial charters around this time is limited, confined to recipients in the eastern part of the *regnum Karlomanni*.

On the other hand, the negative opinion of modern historiography is pitched too far towards the other extreme; as we have seen, Regino's positive judgement of Charles's reunification was no mere literary ornament, since he was on occasion able to get parties from all *regna* to support and follow him in dealing with problems on an empire-wide scale. Moreover, there is no evidence for a west Frankish desire to secede in 885. By way of background, some other observations are worth making here. For one thing, an astonishing 30 of the 64 surviving original charters of Charles went to western recipients, a number out of all proportion with the length of his reign there.⁴⁶ Even allowing for accidents of survival, this shows that western institutions were eager to obtain and careful to preserve the memory of his favour, and while Charles only travelled west twice, the willingness of west Frankish magnates to visit the court in the east is well

⁴³ Nelson, *Charles*, p.256; eadem, 'King', p.65.

⁴⁴ AV s.a.885, p.56.

⁴⁵ Asser, *De Rebus*, c.70, p.52.

⁴⁶ Werner, *Origines*, p.420; idem 'Robertiens', p.21

attested on a number of occasions.⁴⁷ He was, after all, an emperor, and held that position while west Frankish king longer than anyone else since Louis the Pious. The geographical extent of the charters he issued was broad, and they were particularly numerous for recipients in Neustria, Francia proper and Burgundy. Although no recipients from Provence proper are recorded, Charles did grant properties in that *regnum*, and a striking number of coins bearing his name have been unearthed from mints at Marseille and Arles.⁴⁸ The only area which does not figure in Kehr's MGH edition of the royal charters is the bulk of Aquitaine, south of a line between the Loire and Nevers, and west of the Rhône. This, however, may be in part due to the vagaries of survival, since we do know from a later charter of Odo that Charles provided a confirmation at some point for the canons of the church of Clermont.⁴⁹

As well as noting that most of the major ecclesiastical institutions of the kingdom benefitted in this way from Charles's reign, it is also worth observing that his actual itinerary in west Francia on both visits was very limited, confined to the east in 885 and the north in 886, showing that church representatives came vast distances to access his ear. This is especially noticeable during the campaign to relieve Paris from Viking siege in the second half of 886. The run of charters issued here, which must partly be seen as rewards to those who had brought help, give us a glimpse into the composition of the army before the city after the arrival of the emperor. This martial element is reflected in the unusual references to charters being issued 'cum consilio principum nostrorum'.⁵⁰ Contingents from Nevers, Tours, Auxerre, Orléans, Langres and Troyes were certainly present.⁵¹ Certain individual *fideles*, possibly military leaders, were rewarded in Bar, Chartres and Sens.⁵² Most far-travelled was the company of bishop Teotarius of Gerona. He clearly thought it worth the journey to obtain a detailed imperial confirmation, which ordered the people on the church's lands to obey the bishop

⁴⁷ Eg. DD CIII 160 and 161, issued at Kirchen for Odo of Paris.

⁴⁸ D CIII 162; 13 of 20 coins found from Arles and Marseille from the period between 840 and 900 were of Charles the Fat (1 Charles the Bald, 4 Carloman II, 2 Louis of Provence); see Poly, *Provence*, pp.233-4. D CIII 123 was issued for the church of Lyon, which had been politically connected to Provence proper since Boso's revolt, if not before.

⁴⁹ D OP 49.

⁵⁰ DD CIII 145, 147. Cf. DD 137a, 138.

⁵¹ DD CIII 138, 139, 143, 145-147.

as if he were a *comes* of the emperor.⁵³ This was not the first time Gerona had sent a contingent to help the Carolingians; the bishop had also helped Carloman II besiege Vienne in the summer of 881.⁵⁴

This evidence shows that Charles did have a political network of support from which, whether or not it can be characterised as ‘personal’, he was able to benefit on this occasion. The royal court, we can see, was still a pivotal institution for forming and maintaining such networks. In addition to revealing this broad picture, the sources allow us to focus in closer on some of the details of the aristocratic groups of the west in 885-7, how they related to each other and how they operated, and perhaps to place them in a context of royal service throughout the 880s. This will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter, which seeks to establish the nature of Charles’s influence in west Francia and to assess its effectiveness. It will become apparent that the answer to this question lies somewhere in between the two polarised opinions of contemporaries (that Charles’s support was extensive) and historians (that it was negligible).

5.3.1: Theoderic of Vermandois, Gauzlin of St-Denis, Hugh the Abbot and Aletramnus of Beauvais

As the St-Vaast annalist tells us, it was a count Theoderic who was sent to Italy to invite Charles to the west on behalf of the *Franci*. This man, who is often confused in the secondary literature with his namesake ‘the Chamberlain’, count of Autun, has been convincingly identified by Werner as the count of Vermandois, who was also lay abbot of the monasteries of St-Quentin and Morienvall.⁵⁵ Some background is necessary in order to put his position in the reign of Charles the Fat into context. Theoderic was one of the most influential men at the court of Louis III, along with Gauzlin of St-Denis, and as such Werner has discussed this pair as the centre of the most important group of aristocrats in northern France in the early 880s.⁵⁶ This group had become distinguished from another network led by

⁵² DD CIII 137, 142, 144.

⁵³ D CIII 148.

⁵⁴ Bautier, ‘Origines’, p.60; D C2 63.

⁵⁵ Werner, ‘Untersuchungen V’, p.102 with n.59; idem, ‘Gauzlin’, p.446 with n.150a. Theoderic the Chamberlain was already dead at this point. For the following see Map 3.

⁵⁶ Werner, ‘Gauzlin’, pp.441-50.

Hugh the Abbot in the complex and antagonistic political manoeuvrings following the death of Louis the Stammerer. The eventual outcome had been that Gauzlin's supporters had forced a division of the kingdom with the help of Louis the Younger, and had then attached themselves to Louis III's court in Francia and Neustria, leaving Hugh the Abbot's influence confined to the court of Carloman II in Burgundy and Aquitaine.⁵⁷ Theoderic had been one of Louis's military commanders against the Vikings and was also heavily involved in the dispute over the episcopal vacancy at Noyon, which was the central place of his county.⁵⁸ He clearly maintained a high position at the court of Carloman after Louis's death in 882, since it was on his advice that the king reorganised defence of the bridge at Châlons-sur-Marne to help defend the kingdom 'from the infestation of the pagans.'⁵⁹ Theoderic may well have been influential in persuading the king to return Gauzlin to the fullness of royal favour after the troubles of 879-80, which he did in 883 as bishop of Paris.⁶⁰

It was this group which was on the spot in December 884 to take the initiative. As Bautier has shown, it was Gauzlin who was on hand to orchestrate the burial of the young king next to his unfortunate brother at St-Denis, and he who attended to his last wishes.⁶¹ From here it is likely, as argued above, that he and Theoderic gained access to the regalia to send out to Charles the Fat. In terms of the invitation to Charles it is also of interest that Gauzlin already had some political links to the eastern branch of the Carolingian family. He had been held hostage at the court of Louis the Younger after the battle of Andernach in 876 and had made friendly contacts there.⁶² These were doubtless put to good use during the negotiations with Louis preceding the treaty of Fouron in 878, in which Gauzlin was heavily involved, and during the troubles of 879, when he invited Louis to intervene in the west.⁶³ Gauzlin's subsequent importance in the reign of

⁵⁷ Ibid, *passim*.

⁵⁸ AB s.a.882, p.246; D L3 46; Werner, 'Gauzlin', pp.445-6.

⁵⁹ D C2 76.

⁶⁰ D C2 90 shows Theoderic's connections to the bishopric of Paris and the court in general.

⁶¹ Bautier's introduction to DD C2, pp.lv-lvi, lxiv; also D 79 and comments there.

⁶² AB s.a.879, pp.235-6.

⁶³ Note also that these eastern links may have gone back through several decades: in 854, Louis the Younger had been invited to invade by a group, the 'cognatio Gauzberti', who may have been Gauzlin's close relations. AF s.a.854, p.44; Werner, 'Adelsfamilien', pp.138-9.

Charles the Fat is well attested in the sources. At the siege of Paris he was prominent, and in the poem of the monk Abbo it is he who is given the most striking speech concerning the emperor's qualities.⁶⁴ The *dux* Ragnoldus who rose to prominence with a short-lived stint as the main military commander in the west after the apparent retirement of Hugh the Abbot may have been a relative of Gauzlin.⁶⁵ In addition, just before leaving Paris in 886, Charles issued a charter for the monastery of St-Maur-des-Fossés, which included such extensive privileges as free election of abbots, empire-wide toll freedom for the monks, exemption from military service and confirmation of possession of the cell of Glanfeuil, where the community had been established, where Gauzlin had been an oblate and where its founder Roric, Gauzlin's father, was buried. The charter also requested prayers to be said for Charles, his family and the *stabilitas regni*. This unusually generous privilege, essentially an imperial grant of immunity, to the main monastery of the Rorgonid family, an *Eigenkloster* par excellence, can perhaps be seen as a sign of the gratitude which the emperor felt towards the late Gauzlin, who had been one of his chief commanders in the siege of Paris.⁶⁶

In his attempt to destroy an older historiographical tradition which ascribed to Hugh the Abbot total dominance of Carolingian politics between 877 and 886, Werner perhaps goes too far by suggesting that the latter was eclipsed by Gauzlin towards the end of his life.⁶⁷ One reason for this view is the repeated insistence in his work, and indeed in much of the other literature, that the Welfs (the family to which Hugh belonged) were implacably opposed to the Rorgonids (Gauzlin's family) and the Robertians (Odo's).⁶⁸ However, in the light of more recent research, this now appears to be a potentially misleading method of characterising aristocratic relationships. It is clear, for example, that political circumstances could easily supersede family loyalties, and that the two things were far from identical. An obvious example is the political alliance of the Welf

⁶⁴ Abbo, *Bella*, p.18.

⁶⁵ AV s.a.885, p.57; Werner, 'Adelsfamilien', p.142; idem, 'Gauzlin', pp.457-9.

⁶⁶ D CIII 149; note that at the same time Charles may have made a concession to St-Germain-des-Prés, another house closely connected to Gauzlin. Gauzlin and other members of his family were also commemorated at Reichenau, with which Charles had close links; see Oexle, 'Ebroin', pp.168-81.

⁶⁷ Eg. Werner, 'Gauzlin', p.455; idem, 'Les Robertiens', p.20.

⁶⁸ Werner, 'Adelsfamilien', p.140; idem, 'Gauzlin', pp.417-22.

Conrad with Gauzlin in the struggles of 879. There is thus no obstacle to our seeing Hugh, a man with important and extensive political connections in the west, as an ally of Gauzlin and high servant of Charles after 885. If Gauzlin had been on hand at St-Denis to organise the burial of Carloman and the invitation to Charles, it was Hugh who had led the negotiations with the Vikings in the meantime.⁶⁹ As we have seen, Hugh's nephew Rudolf was an important imperial *marchio* and had been involved in facilitating the journey of Charles to assume the west Frankish crown in 885. Hugh appears posthumously in a number of Charles the Fat's charters, on one occasion even in terms of his gift getting an imperial confirmation, something which cannot be said of Gauzlin.⁷⁰ And when they died within weeks of each other in the spring of 886, it was an east Frankish author who described both Hugh and Gauzlin together as 'duces praecipui Galliae regionis, in quibus omnis spes Gallorum contra Nordmannos posita erat.'⁷¹ If by the time Carloman was laid to rest the scars of 879 were beginning to heal and some sort of equilibrium had been achieved between the interests of the Gauzlin-Theoderic party and the supporters of Hugh the Abbot,⁷² the west Frankish reign of Charles the Fat helped the old antagonisms to be forgotten almost completely.

Theoderic of Vermandois can also be shown to have figured highly in the active service of Charles the Fat. We know he was still lay abbot of St-Quentin during the reign, since a chronicle fragment records that he improved the monastery walls in 886.⁷³ While Charles probably did not appoint him, this was an important post in Carolingian politics; it had been held by as distinguished a figure as Louis the Pious's brother Hugh, it had been given special consideration in the Treaty of Verdun in being allowed to stay in Charles the Bald's kingdom, and more recently it (and presumably its abbot, Theoderic) had hosted the definitive negotiations between Gauzlin, Hugh and Louis the Younger in 880.⁷⁴ Theoderic also interceded with Carloman II for his proprietary monastery of

⁶⁹ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.884, p.122.

⁷⁰ DD CIII 143, 145, 161.

⁷¹ AFC s.a.886, p.104.

⁷² Werner, 'Gauzlin', p.455.

⁷³ *Sermo*, pp.271-2.

⁷⁴ AV s.a.880, p.46.

Morienvall: the fact that he did so as ‘comes et abba’ suggests that he also controlled the county of Valois, in which that monastery lay.⁷⁵

Theoderic also formed a key part of Charles the Fat’s defence against the Vikings, as he had Louis III’s. Werner credits King Odo with the creation of a new defensive alignment north of Paris along the Oise, what he calls the *Oiselinie*, an innovation whose efficacy stretched well into the tenth century. He places the origins of this in 890, and says that its first defenders were the counts Herbert I and Herbert II, who controlled the county of Vermandois and the abbey of St-Quentin from 896 as part of a large and important block of territory blanketing the whole region to the north and east of Paris after Theoderic’s son had become a casualty of the expansionism of Baldwin of Flanders.⁷⁶ Werner’s evidence comes, however, from a long period stretching well into the tenth century: the presence of this whole block of lands in the hands of Herbert and his relatives as early as the 890s is therefore impossible to prove. Moreover, there are grounds for seeing a degree of continuity between Carolingian arrangements in the area and Odo’s supposed innovation.

In 885 we find a certain Aletramnus being entrusted with command of a fortification over the Oise at Pontoise, constructed just as Paris itself was being made ready to withstand assault.⁷⁷ Aletramnus, however, was unable to carry out his job successfully; Pontoise was surrounded, the occupants surrendered and hostages were exchanged. After this Aletramnus retreated ‘cum suis’ to Beauvais.⁷⁸ Beauvais is identified by Werner as one of the key *civitates* held north of Paris by Herbert early in Odo’s reign and a crucial piece in the jigsaw of properties held by that family as part of their allegedly newly-conceived defence of the Oise in the 890s.⁷⁹ There is no direct evidence, however, to show that either Herbert I or his brother Pippin were counts at all before the very end of 889.⁸⁰ The high profile of Aletramnus in the annalist of St-Vaast’s account of the Viking

⁷⁵ D C2 90; Grierson, ‘L’Origine’, pp.89-91.

⁷⁶ Werner, ‘Untersuchungen V’, pp.97-8 with n.40, there citing AV s.a 890, p.68; ‘Odo vero rex adunato exercitu super littora Hisae fluminis resedit, ne regnum libere devastarent [i.e. the Vikings]’; AV s.a.895, p.77 for the ousting of Theoderic’s son.

⁷⁷ AV s.a.885, p.57.

⁷⁸ AV s.a.885, p.58.

⁷⁹ Werner, ‘Untersuchungen V’, p.98.

defence and the fact that he retreated to Beauvais in defeat may instead suggest that *he* held this county in 885. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that in around 893 a count Aletramnus was threatened with excommunication by bishop Honorius of Beauvais after joining the supporters of Charles the Simple against Odo.⁸¹ As well as being count of Beauvais, it seems likely on the evidence of a generous gift of Louis the Stammerer in the Laonnais that Aletramnus also held that county,⁸² and it has been plausibly suggested, based on his control of Pontoise, that he was count of Vexin as well.⁸³ Who was he?

Lot identified him with a count of Troyes, Aletramnus II, active from 868 onwards, whom he thought was brought in by Charles the Fat in 885 as an experienced commander to help the defence of Paris.⁸⁴ While the connection between a count of Beauvais/Laon and a count of Troyes is possible, the question of the family descent of this figure, which primarily interested Lot, will not be discussed here; it is the context of the politics of the Paris area which is of more immediate significance. Our best source for this is again the poet Abbo. In the course of the siege, he tells us, a notable victory was won against the enemy, 3,000 of whom were killed by only 600 defenders: ‘Namque triumphantes fratrum promsit geminorum, Fama fuisse Teoderici procerum ast Aledramni.’⁸⁵ This, it seems likely, is a reference to the same Aletramnus and none other than Theoderic of Vermandois, who we know figured highly among the *proceres* of Charles the Fat. Theoderic’s *Eigenkloster*, Morienvall, passed into the hands of Odo’s family after his death in the 890s.⁸⁶ It is therefore surely no coincidence that the properties of Aletramnus ended up in the control of the same family after his death in the first decade of the tenth century, and it has been plausibly suggested that he was in some way related to them.⁸⁷ It is also interesting that if Aletramnus was

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.93; the evidence is D OP 16, although even here the reference is only to Herbert as one of the ‘proceres’, not as ‘comes’.

⁸¹ Flodoard, *Historia*, IV.6, p.571. Cf. Favre, *Eudes*, p.19; Grierson, ‘L’Origine’, pp.87-8; Lot, ‘Notes’, p.151. My interpretation differs from those of these authors.

⁸² D LS 28.

⁸³ Lot, ‘Notes’, p.151; Grierson, ‘L’Origine’, p.87. Pontoise was Vexin’s central place.

⁸⁴ Lot, ‘Notes’, pp.149-53; idem, ‘Aleran’ and ‘Aleran II’.

⁸⁵ Abbo, *Bella*, p.90.

⁸⁶ D CS 105. This charter, issued for Odo’s brother Robert in 920, is also noteworthy for its list of extensive properties pertaining to Morienvall since Theoderic’s days.

⁸⁷ Lot, ‘Notes’, p.153 and n.2.

count of Vexin, he would have been the successor of Nibelung III; and the families of Nibelung and Theoderic of Vermandois were related.⁸⁸ All this strengthens the suspicion that the two figures we have been discussing were related by blood, and indeed were the very brothers mentioned by Abbo.

Aletramus himself had the expected political connections in the Paris region which place him at the heart of the group around Gauzlin. His brother Theoderic seems to have been involved in the dispute over the episcopal vacancy in his county of Beauvais during the reign of Louis III.⁸⁹ Aletramus was a companion of Gauzlin as prisoner in the east following the battle of Andernach, a visit on which, as we saw, Gauzlin is said to have formed useful alliances.⁹⁰ Already in 868 he is found underwriting a judgement in favour of St-Denis, and in 879, when Gauzlin was abbot, he returned everything that Louis the Stammerer had just given him in the Laonnois to the same monastery.⁹¹

The fame of the two brothers did not only leave an impression on contemporaries. An eleventh-century book of *miracula* preserves a memory of their hunting activities in the Ardennes and describes them thus: 'Comitatum Arduennensem agebat Theodericus, cuius frater Alerannus partes æquabat eiusdem comitatus.'⁹² This author, probably a monk of Stavelot, is of course not to be relied on blindly for information about the ninth century. However, his description of the sharing of power by the brothers is useful, especially if we understand 'comitatus' not as a single county but in the more general sense of a command or responsibility. This idea elucidates the report of Abbo, who strongly implies that the 600 soldiers commanded by the brothers were the same 600 imperial troops who had just been sent to Paris by Charles the Fat.⁹³ This shows not only the two counts' closeness to the king, but also suggests, along with our information about Aletramus's abortive attempt to defend Pontoise and about Theoderic leading the forces of Louis III into battle and advising Carloman II on

⁸⁸ Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', pp.101-6. Nibelung had a son called Theoderic. However, the general family relationship helps explain the exchange of names and properties, so there would be no need to insist that Nibelung III was the father of Aletramus and Theoderic.

⁸⁹ D L3 46.

⁹⁰ AB s.a.876, p.209.

⁹¹ D CB 314 for 868; for 879, Doublet, *Histoire*, p.783, and Lot, 'Notes', p.150.

⁹² *Miraculorum S. Huberti*, II.15, p.825.

⁹³ Abbo, *Bella*, pp.88-90.

the defence of the bridge over the Marne, that they were designated as commanders of imperial defence against the Vikings in the same way as Herbert and his kin would be later. Abbo's account also shows that the brothers must have been outside the city when they arrived with the men from Charles; perhaps Aletramus had come from Beauvais or Laon, Theoderic from Noyon or St-Quentin. Here then, already in the mid-880s, we have two brothers operating as defenders of Francia directly at the behest of the emperor, and from exactly that concentrated base around Paris which Werner identified as crucial to the Herbertine accumulation of power and their defence of the *Oiselinie* in the 890s and beyond; Beauvais, Laon, Vermandois, Noyon, St-Quentin, Vexin, Valois. In this constellation of *honores* lay the shared *comitatus* of Theoderic and Aletramus.

So, this is evidence for Charles the Fat putting his trust in the northern French aristocratic group which had invited him to assume the west Frankish kingship in the first place. It also clearly shows at least the kernel of Odo's later defensive policy operating already in the 880s. Odo, of course, was there in 885 to see for himself what the emperor was doing. Far from being a novelty of the 890s, then, we can see how Charles's policy reaches forward into the reign of king Odo. So do the personnel carrying it out; Theoderic and his son remained in possession of Vermandois and St-Quentin until 895, and although Aletramus defected to Charles the Simple in 893, there is no evidence that his county of Beauvais had become attached to the Herbertine agglomeration before 936.⁹⁴

If Odo was not the innovator in this regard that he is made out to be, then it must also be admitted that neither was his predecessor. As well as prefiguring the 890s, Charles's arrangements also reach backwards into the reigns of Louis III and Carloman II. Both of Louis the Stammerer's sons were alert to the necessity of defending the Oise against raids, and several references in the *Annales Vedastini* betray the fact that the river was seen as a definitive defensive boundary in the earlier 880s.⁹⁵ Moreover, Louis III had gone up against heavy ecclesiastical opposition in order to ensure he got the men he wanted in the vacant sees of

⁹⁴ AV s.a.895, p.77; Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', p.93 n.20.

⁹⁵ AV s.a.881, p.50; 881, p.51; 882, p.53; 883, p.54. Cf. 890, p.68; 899, p.81.

Beauvais and Noyon: the filling of such sees had strategic and political importance as well as implications for church hierarchy.⁹⁶ It was Fulk of Rheims who famously pointed out to Charles the extreme importance of defending the nodal point of Paris against capture, and his words have been taken by historians to be somewhat prophetic in the light of subsequent events.⁹⁷ However, Charles was clearly neither the first nor the last king to ensure that measures were taken to prevent such a defeat. Moreover, despite frequent claims to the contrary by historians, Charles's failure to defeat the Paris Vikings outright is attested nowhere as a factor in his deposition.⁹⁸ For all the much-admired bluster of the archbishop of Rheims, it was surely the likes of Gauzlin, Theoderic, Hugh and Aletramus who were giving Charles the best advice on how to deal with the Viking menace at the sharp end, and hence we see him coping with exactly the problem he had been invited into the west to contain.

Behind these very prominent figures, some other members of the group around Gauzlin and Theoderic can be discerned. Herbert I himself, future incumbent of the county of Vermandois, may have begun his steep rise to prominence under Charles the Fat. Having been an important member of the court of Charles the Bald without receiving any recorded *honores*,⁹⁹ Herbert is then known to have become count of Soissons and lay abbot of St-Crépin sometime between October 886 and 898: as Werner has pointed out it is likely that he held these positions before the time of Charles the Simple's rising in 893, and that a plausible occasion was Charles the Fat's stop at Soissons late in 886 when he 'terram inter Francos dispertiit'.¹⁰⁰ Theoderic and Herbert, successive military leaders on the Oise, may therefore have been political associates. In fact, Werner has shown that the families of the two men were related, and while it is misleading to build up too schematic a correlation between family relationships and political positions, the overall concept is convincing, and it helps give substance to our sense of the network of supporters lying behind big players like Theoderic in the

⁹⁶ D L3 44-7 are the key texts; they are illuminated by Werner, 'Gauzlin', pp.440-9. The politico-military aspects of these disputes are nevertheless usually overlooked in the historiography, which tends to discuss them purely in the context of canon law: eg. Devisse, *Hincmar*, pp.984-9.

⁹⁷ Flodoard, *Historia*, IV.5, p.563.

⁹⁸ Reuter, *Germany*, p.120; MacLean, 'Charles'.

⁹⁹ AB s.a.877, p.215.

west Frankish kingdom of Charles the Fat.¹⁰¹ The control by members of this group of many of the key *honores* of northern Francia throughout the ninth century provides a kind of political continuum into which the reign of Charles the Fat can be inserted. The membership of this group of the descendants of king Bernard of Italy, the Herbertines, can only serve to further impress us of the significance of its material and political resources.

5.3.2: Askericus of Paris

Another member of this group of imperial supporters who was of special political significance is Askericus, who became bishop of Paris in autumn 886 after Gauzlin's death on 16 April. He was already well-connected in the Paris area before this, since his brother Tetbert was the count of Meaux killed fighting the Vikings in 888, and they were probably also related to the Herbertines and the rest of the extended family group identified by Werner.¹⁰² Askericus also leads us back to the reception of the emperor by the nobles in 885; in Charles's first diploma issued at Grand as king *in Gallia*, he intervened along with the *marchio* Rudolf and his son for the emperor's *fidelis* Dodo.¹⁰³ Those named, as petitioners for third parties in royal charters, may be regarded as 'in' at court. Askericus's association with the *marchio* Rudolf, another key supporter of the emperor, highlights his closeness to the throne.¹⁰⁴

In any case, his position in the May 885 charter from Grand shows that Askericus was already high in Charles's favour, and his connections to the Paris area and its main comital families suggest that he was intimately involved in Theoderic's mission to receive the new king. Given the paucity of direct evidence for identifying the north Frankish nobles who actually participated at Grand and Ponthion, Askericus in turn helps link the events and people at those two assemblies back to the party of Theoderic and Gauzlin. This impression is made even stronger by the description of Askericus in the charter for Dodo as 'vocatus episcopus'. This term reflects the high regard in which Charles held Askericus,

¹⁰⁰ AV s.a.886, p.62; Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', pp.99-100.

¹⁰¹ Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', esp. pp.92-106.

¹⁰² Abbo, *Bella*, p.100; AV s.a.888, p.66; Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', pp.96-7.

¹⁰³ D CIII 116.

and that he was regarded as the natural candidate for the next available episcopal vacancy, perhaps specifically for Paris. Indeed, Abbo gives us to believe that his appointment as bishop was among Charles's first acts upon entering Paris in 886, and it is possible that the bishopric had been held open for him since Gauzlin's death in April.¹⁰⁵ This scenario certainly gives the lie to Werner's assertion that Askericus was made bishop 'completely according to the wishes of Odo' and suggests that Charles was still very much in control of appointments in the west.¹⁰⁶ The bishop-elect himself presumably arrived there in the imperial entourage, as there is no reference to him during the siege itself, and he may have spent the previous 18 months attached to the court. Askericus clearly remained in favour. In 887 it was he who went to the imperial court to collect the ransom owed to the Paris Vikings.¹⁰⁷ It is suggestive (but no more than that) that while he was there, Charles the Fat tried to impose a man named Teutbertus (which was also the name of Askericus's brother) on the vacant see of Auxerre.¹⁰⁸

5.3.3: Geilo of Langres

If Askericus helps give more width to the group of north Frankish aristocrats standing behind the simple reference of the annalist of St-Vaast to the mission of count Theoderic, he also brings us further south into Burgundy and back to the bishop of Langres; the charter issued for the *fidelis* Dodo at the request of Askericus, Rudolf and Pippin was composed by scribes from the Langres scriptorium. Shortly afterwards Dodo concluded a precarial agreement with Geilo, ensuring that his properties, including the *villa* of Montigny-sur-Aube which he had received from Charles, would go to the church of Langres after his death.¹⁰⁹ Askericus and Geilo certainly knew each other personally, as they must have met at Grand and Paris, and possibly also Kirchen in 887. However, if Askericus had spent some time travelling round with the imperial entourage, it is

¹⁰⁴ DD CIII 116 and 137.

¹⁰⁵ Abbo, *Bella*, p.90; also AV s.a.886, p.62.

¹⁰⁶ Werner, 'Untersuchungen V', p.95; by stressing the importance of Gauzlin in Paris in the 880s, Werner (eg. 'Gauzlin', pp.454-5) perhaps underrates the royal power of appointment.

¹⁰⁷ AV s.a.887, p.63.

¹⁰⁸ See above, c.4.2.1.

¹⁰⁹ D CIII 154.

Geilo who emerges most spectacularly as a court figure after 885, and indeed in late Carolingian politics generally.

Bautier has studied his career and his church's privileges in great detail, and so only one or two points need be made here.¹¹⁰ Bautier sees Geilo as a sinister figure, and casts his rise in terms of a progressive and sustained attempt to acquire as many temporal rights as possible from the Carolingians in order to increase his authority in northern Burgundy. He appears first as abbot of Tournus in the later years of Charles the Bald's reign before moving on to participate at Boso's king-making ceremony at Mantaille in 879, an act which won him the diocese of Langres. Then he joined the flood of erstwhile Boso partisans rushing to defect to the Carolingians in 880, and became one of Carloman II's steadiest supporters, certainly remaining with him at various stages of the siege of Vienne. As already discussed, he was involved in the inception of Charles the Fat's western rule, and he was unusually prominent in the surviving records of Charles's patronage.¹¹¹ After the emperor's death he switched to the party of Guy of Spoleto, whom he crowned in 888 before his own death later that year.

This fast-changing career under several masters, and the fact that the great number of his gifts allow him to be characterised as the grasping aristocrat, a classic historiographical villain, seems to have been what led Bautier to see in Geilo something of a chancer, a man 'd'une personnalité moralement plus que discutable', who displayed 'un total manque de scruples.'¹¹² This judgement of his actions (his actual personality is, of course, obscure) seems rather anachronistic. Geilo's service of several masters in turn was far from unusual; the unusual thing is that we are able to chart it so closely. Aristocrats had to make choices on their feet when the configuration of power in the ruling house altered, and when a king turned up at one's doorstep, as they did on Geilo's in 879, 880, 885 and 888, the choice was not really a free one. Likewise, it cannot be simply assumed that any magnate who was conspicuously successful in obtaining royal patronage was a malignant leech.

¹¹⁰ Bautier, 'Diplômes', pp.216-30.

¹¹¹ DD CIII 117, 118, 129, 147, 152-154, 155a, 162. His scribes connect him to DD 116, 137, 155.

¹¹² Bautier, 'Diplômes', pp.223 and 216 respectively.

If we discard this idea as a starting point, there is no real evidence that Geilo's relationship with Charles the Fat was anything but cooperative. Charles had already had some dealings with the church of Langres before 885; in 882 he had confirmed a precarial deal agreed between Guy of Spoleto and the *praepositus* Othbert.¹¹³ Langres was also endowed with properties in Transjurane Burgundy, where Charles the Fat had had influence since the early 870s.¹¹⁴ As already argued, Geilo was heavily involved in Charles's first movements in the west in 885, and his church was a focus for commemoration of the emperor. In addition, the bishop was present with the court in the east on a number of occasions, notably at Lorsch on 28 August 885, where a ceremony was held to commemorate the death of Louis the German, who had died on the same day nine years earlier and whose body lay in that monastery.¹¹⁵

Bautier's negative view of Geilo's moral shortcomings also colours the way he looks at the events of 887. The most important point came when the bishop received several significant charters on the same day, 15 January 887, at the royal *palatium* of Schlettstadt in Alsace.¹¹⁶ Bautier, this time citing with admiration Geilo's political sagacity, claimed that at this point the bishop realised that the tide was turning against the ailing Charles, and that he now sidled off to Chalon-sur-Saône to a meeting with the most important of the Provençal ecclesiastical nobility. The text of the meeting, which took place on 18 May in the church of St-Marcel-lès-Chalon, reveals only discussion about the peace of the church and the confirmation of various property transactions, but it is reasonable to suppose that political matters were also on the agenda. Bautier suggests that these matters were an expression of intent to persuade the weak-willed and dying Charles to adopt Louis of Provence as his successor; and that the gifts made at Schlettstadt were a (clearly ill-judged) sign of gratitude from the happy king that Geilo was remaining loyal as others considered jumping ship.¹¹⁷ He presents no evidence, however, that anyone else *was* thinking about deserting the king in January 887, and in fact some of the men who supported Guy of Spoleto in 888

¹¹³ D CIII 61.

¹¹⁴ D L2 12; see above, c.3.4.

¹¹⁵ D CIII 129; see c.6.2

¹¹⁶ DD CIII 152-154, probably D 155a.

are found at exactly this time still in favour with Charles, and even accepting a diminution of their comital holdings.¹¹⁸ He also presents the assembly at Chalon as a sinister double of Mantaille, significantly coming shortly after Boso's death in January. In fact, the attendance at the 887 synod was rather less impressive than at the 879 one, and confined mostly to representatives from the northern part of Provence. The archbishops of Tarentaise, Vienne and Lyon and the bishops of Autun, Chalon, Mâcon, Belley and Valence kept Geilo company this time, and there is no *de facto* reason to be overtly suspicious about such a group of ecclesiastics getting together to discuss matters of mutual concern.¹¹⁹ Admittedly, these were men who knew all about raising non-Carolingians to the throne;¹²⁰ but they also knew all about the consequences. Many of them had been among the first to realise the futility of the situation in 880 as the armies of Charles the Fat and his cousins and brother closed in on Vienne.

Bautier's case, then, remains conjectural and unconvincing. Moreover, an alternative reconstruction can be put forward against it. The timing of the gifts to Geilo in early 887 is significant, as they were issued exactly four days after the death of Boso on 11 January. As will be argued in chapter 6.5, it was at this point, as the news reached Schlettstadt, that Charles the Fat and his advisers decided to make some sort of accommodation with Boso's young son Louis, to expunge from the record the usurping activities of his father, and hence to neutralise any threat he might pose by reincorporating him into the legitimate Carolingian family.¹²¹ Geilo was present when the news arrived, and he knew exactly what the emperor planned. The empress Engelberga became involved in negotiations in early February, which shows how quickly Charles must have moved after hearing of Boso's death, and the young prince was received at Kirchen in the summer. If we take away from Geilo some of the great ability for predicting the future with which Bautier credits him, and from Charles some of the crippling illness and susceptibility to manipulation which is attributed to him,¹²² then the bishop can

¹¹⁷ Bautier, 'Diplômes', pp.221-2.

¹¹⁸ D CIII 155. Bizarrely, Bautier seems to acknowledge this himself; 'Diplômes', p.222 and n.52.

¹¹⁹ D CIII 155a; Bautier, 'Diplômes', p.221.

¹²⁰ As observed by Airlie, '*Semper*', p.142.

¹²¹ For the following, see further below, c.6.5.

¹²² See c.6.1.

instead be seen as a royal agent at Chalon, sent to explain and negotiate the new status of Louis with the *proceres* of his father's former kingdom, and hence to keep them involved at the centre of imperial politics. Geilo was there not to conspire to force Louis on the emperor, but rather to mediate the imperial decision to adopt Louis with the nobles of Provence. The council at Chalon was held on 18 May. This fits comfortably with the timing of the Kirchen assembly, which was almost definitely held in June or July.¹²³ Kirchen must have hosted an elaborate and carefully staged ceremony at which the Carolingian element of Louis's and Charles's relationship was emphasised, and the very highest of the *Reichsaristokratie* were present, including Odo and Berengar. Geilo was also there.¹²⁴ Was it perhaps he who had escorted Louis with his mother Irmingarde from Chalon to Kirchen and into the open arms of his benevolent uncle Charles?

The chronology of this hypothesis is more logical than that of Bautier, who starts with the knowledge of Charles's deposition and works backwards through events; he sees the supposed illness and incapacity of Charles as the key to understanding events, and underplays the significance of the timing of Boso's death. The connection between the grants to Geilo and the council of Chalon is strong; one of the items definitely discussed there was exactly this imperial aggrandisement of the position of the bishop of Langres.¹²⁵ If, then, it was the news of the death of Boso that inspired Charles and his advisers to begin negotiations with Engelberga and the high churchmen of Provence to bring about a reconciliation with young Louis, and to choose Geilo as the agent for part of these negotiations, why the lavish grants at the same time?

The charters in question amount to a strong confirmation of Geilo's own position. The first of them speaks in exalted terms about how he had been entrusted with his *civitas* by God in order to protect its inhabitants and its church. He had, it goes on, built up the walls of his town without the help of any *comes* or *iudex*, thus fulfilling the terms of his trust. He is, therefore, granted all the *ex officio* comital holdings in and around Langres, significant extensions to fiscal

¹²³ D CIII 158 issued at Waiblingen on 7 May; DD 159-163 issued at Kirchen, 30 May-23 June; D 164 issued at Lustenau on 24 July.

¹²⁴ D CIII 162.

¹²⁵ D CIII 155a.

rights (including minting), and most of the income from regular markets held in Dijon and Langres.¹²⁶ This, although it in part reflects a situation which the charter's *narratio* tells us had already developed, is an imperial approval for the bishop of Langres to become the main secular authority in the diocese, which was one of the six principal sees of the kingdom. He was confirmed as the preeminent spiritual and secular power in Langres, Dijon and Tonnerre, and he also held notable churches and properties in Atuyer, Troyes, Lassois and Solignac. By contrast, Charles was happy to diminish the holdings of the local counts on behalf of Geilo's subordinates, like the *praepositus* Otbert.¹²⁷ While this development, the eclipsing of comital power at the expense of episcopal, was a phenomenon common to several regions in the spine of the west Frankish and Lotharingian kingdoms in the late ninth and tenth centuries,¹²⁸ this evidence seems to indicate that, certainly by the start of 887 if not before, Charles the Fat was deliberately promoting the process in the Langres area. This preference for delegating authority into the hands of a select group of favoured men was a policy pursued by Charles in various regions of his huge empire.¹²⁹ To have a man like Geilo, a highly prized *fidelis*, dominating northern Burgundy, in a region which was also on the main road between Italy and west Francia, was not only a benefit for the bishop; it aided the smooth flow of authority from court to locality. Geilo already had political connections with the main players in Provence, forged not least during the days of King Boson. On 15 January 887, though, after Boson was gone once and for all, he was also granted greater material wherewithal to back this up, and a solid position from which to negotiate with the leaders of the Provençal political community on behalf of the emperor.

Such a position was there to be filled all the more obviously since the death of the *marchio* Bernard Plantevelue, who had been responsible for the Lyon area, in 886.¹³⁰ That the gifts came hot on the heels of Boson's death is rendered even more suggestive by the fact that the latter had held extensive lands in the

¹²⁶ D CIII 152; for comments see Bautier, 'Diplômes', pp.224-5. DD 153, 154, 155a are similarly impressive enhancements.

¹²⁷ D CIII 155.

¹²⁸ See Bautier, 'Diplômes', esp. pp.209-10, 233-8.

¹²⁹ See c.4.3.

¹³⁰ See c.4.3.

diocese of Langres.¹³¹ Were some of these now confirmed by Charles in Geilo's possession? This is extremely hard to prove. Perhaps a hint that Geilo had in a sense succeeded Boso in some of his old capacities comes from the bishop's success in intervening on behalf of his old community at Tournus to get Charles to concede the abbey of Donzère on the Rhône in Provence.¹³² Almost exactly a decade earlier this same monastery had been given to the church of St-Vincent in Viviers by Charles the Bald at the request of Boso.¹³³ Their relationships with the grant were thus analogous; and in fact it had also been Boso who had intervened with Charles to give Geilo the abbey of Tournus in the first place.¹³⁴ The idea that he had been 'replaced', like the reconciliation with Louis, would be another way of closing the book on Boso. If this were true, it might also explain why the synod of Chalon felt the need to confirm the imperial grant; it is noticeable that it distinguishes the general holdings of the church of Langres and the properties 'quas ipse [i.e. Geilo] suo tempore per praecepta apud eiusdem domnum et gloriosissimum imperatorem adquisivit.'¹³⁵

5.3.4 Odo of Paris

Finally, Odo himself is easily located within the group of Charles's stalwarts in the western kingdom. The exact nature of his personal relationship with Charles after 886 has already been discussed.¹³⁶ Here it will simply be necessary to point out his connections with other members of the Seine-Oise aristocracy in the 880s. Odo's family was closely connected politically to Gauzlin's, and it is possible that his own wife was a Rorgonid who brought important lands to her husband.¹³⁷ Gauzlin, by this time returned to the heights of royal favour, and with a number of important *honores* in Paris, including St-Denis, may have been influential in securing Odo's appointment as count there in late

¹³¹ Bautier, 'Diplômes', p.219; idem, 'Origines', pp.52-4.

¹³² D CIII 162.

¹³³ D CB 443. Might Boso's death explain why the king now felt that the church was back in his gift?

¹³⁴ D CB 378. See also D 419 for links between Boso and Dijon.

¹³⁵ D CIII 155a. DD C2 49-55 may reveal, as Bautier, 'Origines', pp.58-9 argues, the confiscation of a block of Boso's properties in Berry.

¹³⁶ See c.4.2.

¹³⁷ Favre, *Eudes*, p.13; Werner, 'Adelsfamilien', p.140 n.15.

882 or early 883.¹³⁸ This appointment was also smoothed by Odo's probable family link through his mother to the kin of counts Bego and Adalhard, which had been closely associated with the Parisian comital office and the monastery of St-Denis on and off since the eighth century. This family, which lost its primacy in the Paris area after defecting to Lothar in 840, was also related to the Rorgonids, and had been the proprietary clan of the monastery of Fossés before the Rorgonids made it their *Eigenkloster* in 868.¹³⁹ Gauzlin's closeness to Odo at the siege of Paris is apparent from the report of Abbo, whose evidence is particularly noteworthy since he was related to the former and wrote for the latter.¹⁴⁰ His work casts them together as defenders of Paris, one as 'consul', the other as 'praesul' of the city.¹⁴¹ It is also worth observing that the key *honores* of Gauzlin (St-Amand, St-Germain-des-Prés, St-Denis), as well as those of Theoderic of Vermandois, ended up in the hands of Odo's family and provided an important foundation for their kingship.¹⁴² Theoderic himself also had influential connections in Paris, shown for example in his association with bishop Ingelwin when they intervened together for the church of Châlons-sur-Marne,¹⁴³ and if he mediated the return of Gauzlin he may also have influenced the appointment of Odo. Finally Hucbald, count of Senlis and another notable figure in the Seine-Oise area, was a political ally of Odo: a contemporary letter implies that after taking over Neustria the latter allowed Hucbald to use for himself some of the lands of St-Symphorien, Orléans, in his own area.¹⁴⁴

Odo's political links with Gauzlin and Theoderic are enough to suggest that he too was one of the 'Franci' who sent out the invitation to Charles the Fat in December 884. Like Gauzlin's, his family were well-connected in east Carolingian political circles, and Odo himself had been at Lorsch in 876 to make a donation.¹⁴⁵ His brother Robert was already a count in Namur on the line splitting

¹³⁸ Werner, 'Robertiens', p.20.

¹³⁹ Brown, 'Politics', esp. pp.163-7, 177-203; 200-1 for Odo's relationship.

¹⁴⁰ On Abbo and the Rorgonids see Oexle, 'Ebroin', p.207, n.354; on Abbo and Odo see c.4.2.2.

¹⁴¹ Abbo, *Bella*, esp. pp.16-8 for the sense of joint responsibility.

¹⁴² Werner, 'Gauzlin', p.461 and n.220.

¹⁴³ D C2 76.

¹⁴⁴ Bischoff, *Anecdota*, pp.131-2; the letter complains that Odo has taken some of St-Symphorien's holdings in the Orléannais, while Hucbald at the same time usurped what was in 'istius patriae [i.e. Silnectensis].'

¹⁴⁵ D Lor 1835. Werner, 'Les Robertiens', pp.15-8 on the family's east Frankish origins.

Lotharingia, and had been at Metz in 884 to seek the emperor's patronage.¹⁴⁶ The esteem in which Charles held Robert is emphasised both by the terms used by the charter to describe him, 'vir nobilis comes fidelissimus',¹⁴⁷ and his success in getting a clearly valuable *villa* held by him *in beneficio* handed over to his *fidelis* Sanctio, the father of the tenth-century reformer St. Gerard of Brogne, *in proprietatem*.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Odo himself occupies an unusually prominent position in imperial charters even *before* being put in charge of Neustria after the siege of Paris, a position which also implies a close relationship with Charles.¹⁴⁹

5.4: Conclusion

In these men we can see the most conspicuous members of a coherent aristocratic group supporting Charles the Fat in west Francia. Can it be described as a 'personal network'? Charles was a largely absentee ruler for this *regnum*, and these people had not been children with him at the court of Louis the German, nor had they been at his side during his apprenticeship for royal office in Alemannia. Still, there are hints in the evidence at least for Gauzlin, Odo and Geilo of a peculiar trust which could be characterised as personal. Was it a network? This can by no means be simply assumed from the demonstration of familial links, for instance between Werner's so-called Theoderici and Childebrand-Nivelung clans, to which most of the figures we have been discussing belonged. However, although only some of the very top players are revealed by the evidence, they must represent broad substrata of men and resources,¹⁵⁰ and although the details are often blurry the overall picture is clear. The group based around Paris and Neustria which the sources allow us to glimpse can be linked into a network by our perception of them actually acting together under the authority of the emperor. This was not, or not merely, a 'personal' or a 'familial' network, it was first and foremost a *political* network. Those who invited Charles in also served him and were rewarded by him; Odo, Gauzlin, Theoderic, Aletramus and others are seen

¹⁴⁶ D CIII 105; see Wollasch, 'Klostergründung', p.63; idem, 'Reformmönchtum', pp. 224-5.

¹⁴⁷ This is an unusual superlative; cf. DD CIII 2, 57, 89, 102.

¹⁴⁸ For the significance of this kind of grant see Airlie, 'Behaviour', p.212; Tessier's commentary on DD CB, vol.3, p.94.

¹⁴⁹ DD CIII 139, 143, 146.

¹⁵⁰ See Airlie, 'Aristocracy', pp.435, 448.

doing just that. Further south, although the sources are not so revealing, the responsibilities bestowed upon the likes of Geilo of Langres and Bernard Plantevelue show that it was not just this Paris group who supported Charles, although it can be seen in action most clearly. A huge number of western institutions sought out his patronage and took care to preserve its memory. In other words, although his reign in the kingdom of his cousins lasted only two and a half years, and hence cannot really be 'judged' in comparison to those of some of his longer-lasting forbears, we can see that Charles the Fat had the resources and made the effort not simply to reign there, but also to rule. If there was a mood of gloom about the run of bad luck striking the Carolingian family in the earlier 880s, in Abbo of St-Germain-des-Prés there can be discerned an unmistakable optimism in the power of the new king who had freed Paris from danger. His rule was respected by his western supporters; they did not break from the eastern kingdom in 885 or even in November 887, but waited until Charles the Fat was dead before choosing a new king.

When they finally did so it was from among their own number, and the opening of Odo's reign shows a continuity from that of his predecessor. While he faced more opposition in Aquitaine and Burgundy, sections of whose nobility took the opportunity provided by the absence of a Carolingian king to build up their own positions, in Francia he kept his friends. Most strikingly, the *Annales Vedastini* tell us that exactly the same man who had represented those inviting Charles in 884 now repeated the favour for Odo in 888: Count Theoderic, whom the annalist describes as predominant in the new king's following, proceeded to negotiate on Odo's behalf with Arnulf of Carinthia.¹⁵¹ The same political group acted for Odo at the start of 888 as had acted for Charles at the end of 884. Theoderic's son took over from him shortly afterwards before falling foul of the grand designs of the count of Flanders.¹⁵² In the meantime, the defence of the *Oiselinie* remained concentrated. Robert became *marchio* of Neustria in the role created for Odo by Charles the Fat in 886. Askericus went on to take charge of the royal chancery. Archbishop Walter of Sens, who crowned Odo, was appointed

¹⁵¹ AV s.a.888, pp.64-5.

¹⁵² AV s.a.895, p.77.

in Charles's reign. It was from this core of support that Odo gradually extended his authority over the *regnum* during the following year or so. Therefore in terms of personnel as well as political structures, the reign of Charles the Fat leads us forward to the start of that of Odo.

Some of these men, like Odo himself or Askericus, were put in place by Charles the Fat. As should be clear, others, like Gauzlin, Theoderic, Aletramnus and Geilo, take us back to the heart of the court circles of Louis III and Carloman II.¹⁵³ There are clues, however, which allow us to speculate about the origins of this continuity even further back in time. It is generally acknowledged by historians that the Capitulary of Quierzy, in which Charles the Bald spelled out the arrangements for governing the western kingdom while he set off for Italy in 877, reflects a subtle change in the political configuration of the high aristocracy. While the most famous *primores*, Hugh the Abbot, Bernard Plantevelue, Boso, were given prominent positions in the kingdom, they had been absent from the key negotiations and were not granted any role in the temporary court of Louis the Stammerer, probably because Charles hoped to call on them to aid him in Italy should the occasion arise.¹⁵⁴ Those who were given the best access to court were lesser men, from outside the ranks of the 'supermagnates' whom Charles had been building up throughout the 870s, and towards whom the smaller aristocrats may have felt some resentment.¹⁵⁵ Those designated at Quierzy as Louis's advisers were connected to each other politically through the court, but also geographically; the core were all, unlike any of the supermagnates, from Francia proper. They were counts Adalelm of Laon, Adalard count of the palace, Baldwin of Flanders, Conrad of Sens (later Paris), Theoderic of Vermandois; the bishops of Paris, Tournai, Beauvais and Soissons; and abbots Welf of St-Colombe in Sens (Conrad's brother), Gauzlin of St-Denis and Fulk of St-Bertin. The supermagnates feared that the provisions in Quierzy concerning this group, which Charles bolstered in the latter years of his reign,¹⁵⁶ would become crystallised if the emperor died in Italy, and they broke into revolt in an attempt to draw him

¹⁵³ Note also the Germundus in D CIII 142, perhaps the same man whose daughter had been involved in the bizarre death of Louis III; AV s.a.882, p.52.

¹⁵⁴ *Conventus Carisiacensis*; Nelson, *Charles*, pp.246-52.

¹⁵⁵ Airlie, 'Behaviour', pp.205-56 is the most detailed account of these developments.

back across the Alps. They were too late, and after their worst nightmare had proceeded to come true these two groups, the supermagnates and the north Frankish nobles, remained visibly distinct through the reign of Louis the Stammerer.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the attempt of Gauzlin and Conrad and their unnamed accomplices (was Theoderic involved? St-Quentin did hold some of the negotiations...) to divide the kingdom in 879-80 was in the main an attempt to wrest influence back from the likes of Hugh, Bernard and Boson, who looked set to benefit exclusively from proximity to the *Alleinherrschaft* of Louis III. This struggle in particular, with the impending threat of Louis the Younger always looming on the horizon, must have lived long in the memory. The capitulary of 877, then, left a strong imprint on the political alignments of the following years. The document itself even served as the model for the royal *promissiones* of Louis the Stammerer, Carloman and Odo.¹⁵⁸ If by 885 the scars were healing, we can still make out a distinct group of magnates whose interests were focused in Francia proper.

While Charles the Bald was building up these men in the last years of his life, we can catch occasional glimpses of how this might have contributed to their formation of a political network. In 870 Charles's negotiating team prior to the *divisio* of Meerssen was led by Adalelm of Laon, Theoderic of Vermandois and bishop Odo of Beauvais, along with the chamberlain Engelram and another Adalelm.¹⁵⁹ Adalelm, Engelram, Gauzlin and Conrad were likewise involved together in the rising of Charles the Bald's son Carloman as a letter of Hincmar in 871 shows.¹⁶⁰ Adalelm himself was a relative of Odo, possibly through marriage to the sister of Robert the Strong.¹⁶¹ Adalard count of the palace was another who had been taken prisoner at Andernach with Gauzlin and Aletramnus.¹⁶²

Of course, political alliances could change in the blink of an eye. The point of this is simply to show that there is a context for the development of a

¹⁵⁶ Nelson, *Charles*, pp.246-7.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.255.

¹⁵⁸ *Capitula Electionis Hludowici Balbi Compendii Facta; Karolomanni Conventus Carisiacensis; Odonis Regis Promissio.*

¹⁵⁹ *Pactiones Aquenses.*

¹⁶⁰ Flodoard, *Historia*, III.26, p.543. Cf. Nelson, *Charles*, pp.228-9.

¹⁶¹ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.892, p.139; Werner, 'Untersuchungen IV', p.159.

¹⁶² AB s.a.876, p.209.

political network among the members of the north Frankish aristocracy during the 870s, certainly by 877. Geography here coincided with politics and occasionally family; Charles the Bald clearly considered them a unit by the time of the assembly at Quierzy. This network was significant in many of the events from 877 to 888 and beyond.

Finally, did what looks from the outside like a political network have such a consciousness of its own position? This is always a difficult question, but there are signs that in this case the answer is yes.¹⁶³ A lost set of annals from Theoderic's monastery of St-Quentin recorded in 882: 'post cuius [ie.Louis III] obitum *Franci* regem constituerunt Karlomannum.'¹⁶⁴ It was, of course, the 'Franci' who were also said to have sent the invitation out to Charles the Fat after Carloman's death.¹⁶⁵ These are views from the inside. An even more telling example is the diploma of Carloman from 884 issued for the church of Châlons-sur-Marne.¹⁶⁶ The charter is unusual because it is dated 'anno II regni Karlomanni regis in Frantia.' This is unique in dating the reign only to Carloman's succession to Louis III in Neustria and Francia, and not in total regnal years back to 879, which was the normal practice of Carloman's chancery.¹⁶⁷ For some people, this implies, it was rule of Francia proper which really counted. It is of special interest, then, that the document was drafted by scribes from outside the chancery, and that one of the men named as intervening for its production is none other than count Theoderic, the representative of the *Franci* in 884 and the lay-abbot of St-Quentin whence came the lost annals.¹⁶⁸ This sort of sentiment fits well with the impression of 'regnal awareness' we get from the literary sources, especially from Gauzlin's relation Abbo, who was given to lambasting the character of Burgundians and Aquitanians while passionately praising the Franks and

¹⁶³ As also argued by Werner, 'Gauzlin', p.453.

¹⁶⁴ *Sermo*, p.272. My emphasis.

¹⁶⁵ AV s.a.884, p.56; NB in light of the discussion in c.5.2 the use of this word rather than a phrase like 'qui fuerant in regno Karlomanni.'

¹⁶⁶ D C2 76.

¹⁶⁷ Bautier, introduction to DD C2, pp.xxxvi-xxxix, lxxxi. Carloman's chancery dates are confused, but typically go back either to the death of Louis the Stammerer or the crowning at Ferrières.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Karolomanni Capitula Compendii de Rapinis Promulgata* from 883, also dated 'anno regni sui in Francia primo'.

Neustrians, and also from the annalist of St-Vaast.¹⁶⁹ There was thus a contemporary self-awareness of the significance of the geo-political groupings which had coalesced during the last years of Charles the Bald.

The importance of this group based 'in Francia' successively to Charles the Bald, Louis the Stammerer, Louis III, Carloman II, Charles the Fat and Odo must be recognised. Although it does not do to schematise such ideas too much, there is enough evidence to show a continuum in this network and its main figures from the 870s to the 890s, figures whose political identities were given coherence by their common experience of royal service and defence against the Vikings. This sort of continuity is hardly surprising, but it is rarely if ever stressed, and in fact is often assumed to be absent. In this continuum the reign of Charles the Fat is not to be seen as a 'blosses Intermezzo'.¹⁷⁰ He used the same tools as had been at the disposal of his predecessors and would be to his successor. Although his reign was in some ways anomalous and was too short to be put to a sustained test of strength it is overly pessimistic to conclude that 877 saw the collapse of west Frankish political institutions.¹⁷¹ Rather, the reign of Charles the Fat can be seen as a keystone of the bridge connecting the last years of Charles the Bald with the first years of King Odo.

Thereafter, however, the situation began to fragment. As king, Odo enjoyed only moderate success outside Francia proper. One reason for this was that the arrival in the west Frankish kingdom of Guy of Spoleto later in 888 saw the severing of links between the most important Frankish and Burgundian supporters of Charles the Fat: Geilo of Langres threw in his lot with the new claimant against Odo, and Rudolf had himself proclaimed king in Transjurane Burgundy. Moreover, the rising of Charles the Simple in 893 saw more cracks opening even within the aristocracy of Francia proper itself. The overarching authority of Charles the Fat had provided a focus for the loyalties of these geographically disparate aristocracies, and bound them together into the single political structure of the reunified Carolingian empire. After his death, however, the appearance of several kings competing for legitimacy and support divided the

¹⁶⁹ On Abbo see above, c.4.2.2; on the St-Vaast annals see Ehlers, 'Anfänge', pp.27-8.

¹⁷⁰ Brühl, *Fodrum*, pp.35-6.

¹⁷¹ As does Nelson, *Charles*, pp.258-63.

loyalties of these men and forced them to make choices which necessarily pitted them against each other. Now, not even the notional unity which had been articulated by the rule of multiple members of the Carolingian family held sway. Here we can see the political map of Europe beginning to metamorphosise into its tenth-century shape during the reign of Odo, not during that of Charles: the geographical fragmentation of royal power was a phenomenon of the period after 888, not after 877.¹⁷²

Having said all that, it must be stressed again that in many ways it is not surprising to discover that the west Frankish kingdom was governed by Charles the Fat in much the same way as by his predecessors. His most pressing political problems were, as has already been emphasised, not those related to the institutional logistics of government. The absence of easily-accessible *Königsnähe*, which characterised the emperor's control of the various *regna*, and stood in sharp contrast to the situation under the multiple kingdoms of the late 870s, was Charles's real problem. He did not have any legitimate sons to send out into the *regna* as kings and diffuse access to the dynasty: this, and not newly-emergent aristocratic authority, the view that the reunification was 'anachronistic', or the desire of the *regna* to secede, was the crucial difference between his empire and that of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. The problem was not that the nobility wanted to shake off Carolingian rule: it was that that they could not get enough of it. To ease the pressure, the emperor needed above all to resolve the doubts over the imperial succession, and hence find a way to make *Königsnähe* a more readily-available commodity. The empire *was* too big for one man, but then it always had been. Obedience to the Carolingians had never been blind, and the longer Charles's reign continued without such a solution, the more stress would be placed upon his position. Charles himself was well aware of this state of affairs, and the great lengths to which he went to resolve it will be the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁷² See c.8.

6: THE POLITICS OF SUCCESSION AND THE DEPOSITION OF CHARLES THE FAT, 885-7

6.1: Three explanations: *Verfassungsgeschichte*, unity theory and the emperor's illness

The final three years of the reign of Charles the Fat witnessed one of the most spectacular changes of fortune in Carolingian political history. In spring 885 Charles had been able to give territorial substance to his imperial dignity with the undisputed succession to the realm of Carloman II, and later that same year he and his supporters dealt quickly and efficiently with the would-be usurper Hugh of Lotharingia and his Viking ally Godafrid, putting both out of the picture permanently: his confidence was, at this point, high.¹ Nonetheless, Charles's succession plans remained shrouded in doubt as long as he failed to produce an indisputably acceptable heir. Despite continuing to demonstrate the effectiveness of his own rule in various parts of the empire, for example in the conclusion of the siege of Paris in 886, this political problem lurked in the background as an ever-increasing threat to his credibility. Finally, after a series of efforts to resolve the issue (including the adoption of Louis of Provence and the divorce of the Empress Richgard), in November 887 he was deposed and replaced in the east by his brother's illegitimate son Arnulf of Carinthia.² Regino of Prüm, reflecting several years later on the course of events, could still hardly believe how quickly power had slithered from the hands of Charles the Fat: 'Erat res spectaculo digna et aestimatione sortis humanae rerum varietate miranda.'³

Regino, diligent historian that he was, also had an opinion on the long-term significance of what had occurred. His famous analysis of the subsequent conflicts amongst the *reguli* shows that he was aware of how the events of 887-8 had shattered the monolith of Carolingian legitimacy once and for all; the new kings were too equal in authority for any one of them to dominate the rest and prevent wars between them.⁴ For Regino there was of course a moral to the story (it served as a demonstration of how God-given *fortuna* could be all too easily lost

¹ See below, c.6.4.

² See below, c.6.6.1(divorce); c.6.5 (adoption); c.6.7 (deposition).

³ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128.

⁴ Ibid, s.a.888, p.129; for discussion see Airle, 'Semper', pp.129-30.

thanks to the tragic intervention of human frailty), but his assessment of the wide-reaching outcome of the strife of 887-8 was essentially a political one.⁵ Events had brought it about: at Tribur in November 887 the magnates had decided that Charles was too ill to rule and summoned Arnulf, and, even more importantly for Regino, Charles had then died. However, the abbot of Prüm's clarity of explanation has not always been matched in more recent accounts of the end of the Carolingian empire, which have often tended to over-schematise things. Here, by way of introduction to this chapter, it is worth pondering for a moment on the main forms that this tendency has taken.

German historians of the twentieth century have, like Regino, entered the debate over the significance of the year 888 for medieval *Verfassungsgeschichte*, but, unlike him, have sometimes tacitly removed politics and events from their explanations. The best example of this is the well-known exchange between Tellenbach and Schlesinger and some others in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. While Tellenbach took the view that Arnulf's revolt was essentially just another military coup of a type common enough in the brutal world of Frankish politics, Schlesinger insisted that his rise represented the establishment of a new kind of elective kingship brought about by the development of an increasingly independent and class conscious aristocracy which began to impose institutional checks on the power of the monarchy.⁶ The matters at stake were essentially whether or not 887-8 saw the creation of a kingdom of Germany, and whether king or *Volk* held the whip hand within it. The main reason for the spectacular divergence of views lies in the fact that the two continuations of the *Annales Fuldenses*, which perhaps inevitably exert great influence on the structure of modern accounts, present diametrically opposing versions of the events of 887. The Bavarian continuator, anxious to justify Arnulf's actions, stressed the role of a wide-reaching magnate conspiracy against Charles the Fat, while the Mainz annalist, now back on the emperor's side after the restoration of Archbishop Liutbert to court, presented Arnulf as a rebel, seizing power by (implicitly

⁵ For Regino's idea of *fortuna* see now Körtüm, 'Weltgeschichte'.

⁶ Most of the contributions are collected in Kämpf, *Entstehung*, and Hlawitschka, *Königswahl*. For useful commentaries see Freed, 'Reflections', p.555; Bowlus, 'Early History', pp.554-7, 573. Reuter, 'Nobility', p.185, n.28 notes a methodological aspect to the dispute.

illegitimate) force alone.⁷ The disputants were thus readily able to find in the contemporary texts exactly what they wanted to find, and to construct contradictory hypotheses accordingly. Whichever side, if any, one favours, this approach is methodologically suspect, as it involves generalising from texts which were written in particular contexts and with specific political aims in mind.

Despite this problem, and despite the fact that the concerns debated by Tellenbach and Schlesinger are no longer such hot issues as they were in 1940s Germany, the terms of the discussion about the balance between *Adel* and *Kaiser* established the paradigms for many further discussions of the rising of Arnulf and the end of the Carolingian empire. As argued in chapter 2, historians are still inclined to sidestep the thorny problem of how to reconcile the contrasting sources by selecting somewhat indiscriminately from each of them to create a new political narrative. The accepted history of the 880s has become a catalogue of disasters: individual events are taken out of context from different sources in order to affirm an image of events running out of control. This cut-and-paste method has produced, for example, the misleading juxtaposition of the strong aristocracy of the Bavarian annalist's entry for 887 and the Mainz continuator's polemic about the weak emperor 5 years earlier.⁸ This amounts to a tacit declaration by posterity of Schlesinger as the victor in the debate over German *Verfassungsgeschichte*: the crisis of 887-8 is commonly held to be the outcome of momentous but nebulous historical processes, such as the 'rise of the aristocracy' and the 'decline of royal authority', which the course of contemporary events and politics passively reveals, but does not affect.⁹

At a slightly lower level of abstraction, the end of the reign of Charles the Fat has also been frequently explained in terms of contemporary ideology. In particular, the adoption of Louis of Provence by the emperor in the early summer of 887 is nearly always glossed as a policy designed by the archchancellor Liutward, supposedly acting as the representative of a faction with a principled belief in the divisibility of the empire. His subsequent ejection from court and replacement by Liutbert of Mainz is accordingly thought to represent the victory

⁷ Bowlus, 'Early History', p.557.

⁸ Eg. Fried, 'Kingdoms', p.159.

of a 'unity' party bent on retaining the territorial integrity of the realm. On the strength of the Mainz annalist's invective against Liutward in his 887 report, where the fallen archchancellor is said to have conspired with Arnulf to bring down Charles, this ideological disagreement is brought to bear as a key factor in the deposition of the emperor.¹⁰ However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the principle of imperial unity has been more appealing to historians of the twentieth century than to contemporaries.¹¹ Indeed, one has the impression that the idea of unity was never really a fixed principle in Carolingian government (although Louis the Pious did try, unsuccessfully, to reach such a formulation), but was a rhetorical position which could be adopted in the course of rather more specific political circumstances.¹² For example, Florus of Lyons' lament on the division of the empire, the *locus classicus* of Carolingian unity theory, is often read by historians as representative of a general clerical response to the projected *divisio* of 843. In reality, Florus was a partisan author, and his work had the specific aim of re-emphasising the imperial claims of Lothar in the runup to the Verdun negotiations.¹³ There is no source to back up this supposed ideological divide as an explanation for Charles's deposition; the circumstances of Liutward's expulsion from court are obscure, and even the veracity of the report that he helped Arnulf come to power is questionable.¹⁴ What we know of the thoughts of Liutbert of Mainz gives no clue that he believed unchangingly in the maintenance of Frankish territorial coherence,¹⁵ and we know nothing reliable about the personality or views of Liutward beyond what we choose to deduce from his actions; the circularity of that approach is obvious. In other words, historians have sometimes interpreted the key political events of the year 887 as the result of a clash between factions representing two momentous ideologies; ideologies which

⁹ Schlesinger, 'Auflösung', is a classic statement; cf. Fried, *Weg*, pp.109, 447-8.

¹⁰ Keller, 'Sturz', pp.379-84; Tellenbach, 'Grundlagen', p.230; Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', p.112; Fried, *Weg*, pp.428-9.

¹¹ It is a particularly strong theme in Halphen, *Charlemagne*, which was written as Europe fell into conflict in the 1930s and 40s.

¹² Penndorf, *Problem*, generally succeeds in demystifying the concept of Carolingian *Reichseinheitsidee*.

¹³ Nelson, 'Search', pp.101-2; cf. the discussions of the *Visio Karoli* below, cc.6.5 and 8.

¹⁴ Bühner-Thierry, 'Évêques', p.41. See below, c.6.6.

¹⁵ For some of what we do know see Büttner, 'Liutbert', pp.104-15; Hartmann, *Konzil*, pp.56, 68, 93-9, 105-6.

we cannot prove to have even existed, never mind to have been at the forefront of the minds of the protagonists.¹⁶ As with the scholarly preoccupation with the *verfassungsgeschichtliche* significance of the deposition of the emperor, this approach has minimised the role of events and politics in historical explanation by reducing human actors to little more than passive vectors of great ideas and processes. More particularly, Charles himself has been removed almost completely from the explanation of his own fate, made an unthinking cipher totally at the mercy of the powerful men in his court and kingdom and their shadowy 'factions'.

That this has been possible is partly due to the third and last theme which dominates accounts of the reign, that of the emperor's illness. With this we are much closer to the level of everyday politics, as a sick king was vulnerable to opposition on the grounds of being unfit to rule. Charles the Fat is often characterised negatively in the historiography as 'weak' and 'sick' as an individual, not to mention 'unpleasant and gauche', 'high strung' and 'raving mad'.¹⁷ As already commented, such ascriptions of personality traits to most figures in the early middle ages are dubious, as they are usually inferred from the same events and actions which they are then used to explain. In Charles's case they do stem in part from the evidence of illness which peppers his reign. This amounts to the widely-reported 'fit' he suffered at Frankfurt in 873¹⁸; Hincmar's description of him as 'infirmus' in 876¹⁹; a charter of 883 in which the emperor made a gift to the church of Bergamo in thanks to St. Alexander, 'ad cuius limina confugimus cuiusque intercessionibus a gravi infirmitate corporis nos dominus restituit sanitati'²⁰; two annalistic references reporting a sickness in the winter of 886-7²¹; and the Bavarian continuator's account that in 887 Charles 'pro dolore

¹⁶ It is telling that some historians (such as Schieffer, 'Karl', p.148) swap the positions supposedly held by Liutbert and Liutward: the 'unity' hypothesis is not being proven here, but simply used as a convenient explanation for obscure events.

¹⁷ Respectively: Borgolte, 'Karl', p.21; Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.139; Kantorowicz, 'Carolingian King', p.92; Dutton, *Politics*, p.227; Fried, *Weg*, p.423. These traits are often used as an explanation for Charles's fall: eg. Tellenbach, 'Grundlagen', p.300.

¹⁸ See c.1.2.

¹⁹ AB s.a.876, p.210.

²⁰ D CIII 89.

²¹ AFC s.a.886, p.105; BC s.a.887, p.115.

capitis incisionem accepit.’²² The most striking piece of evidence, the latter, has been taken to mean that Charles was trepanned in order to cure a tumour, epilepsy or some form of mental illness. However, Hans Oesterle has rightly pointed out that the text is best read as signifying a letting of blood to cure a headache, not an incision *of* the head itself, and that standard ninth-century medical wisdom would not have advised a trepanning for either head pains or for epilepsy.²³ Moreover if, as Oesterle plausibly argues, Carolingian medical knowledge incorporated the eighth-century tract ‘De minutione sanguinis sive de phleotomia’ attributed to Bede, it is highly significant that this text advises the opening of the ‘vena cephalica’ to relieve head pains on the nones of April, as we know that Charles was at Bodman, where the operation was carried out, in March and April.²⁴ In other words, the blood-letting was carried out at this point not because of the mounting gravity of Charles’s illness, as the Bavarian annalist, anxious to justify Arnulf’s usurpation, would like us to believe, but rather in accordance with the specifications of received medical wisdom.

The contexts of the other references allow us to play down their significance also. The spasm of 873 bears the hallmarks more of a literary set-piece than of a dispassionate medical report; and in any case Louis the German allowed Charles to take charge of important diplomatic and judicial hearings immediately afterwards.²⁵ Hincmar’s 876 reference is isolated, and precedes by a matter of days the formal *divisio* of the eastern kingdom agreed to by Charles’s brothers, a political event of the highest importance. The reference to the cure by St. Alexander was presumably of the same disease which affected many people in Italy in the summer of 883, and had a habit of laying low visiting Franks from north of the Alps throughout the ninth century and later.²⁶ Although it hindered Berengar’s mission to oust Guy of Spoleto on Charles’s orders, there is no evidence that this fever was any more than a one-off illness. Likewise, the

²² BC s.a.887, p.115.

²³ Oesterle, ‘Kopfoperation’.

²⁴ D CIII 157 shows him at Rottweil in mid-February, and BC s.a.887, p.115 has him at Bodman before leaving for an assembly at Waiblingen after Easter, which fell on April 16. The first diploma issued at Waiblingen was D 158 of May 7, but we know that Pope Stephen was invited to the assembly for April 30; *Fragmenta*, no.14.

²⁵ See c.1.2.

²⁶ BC s.a.883, p.110.

affliction of winter 886-7 was followed by intense diplomatic activity on Charles's part aimed largely at resolving the succession issue.²⁷ None of this evidence, therefore, permits the conclusion that Charles, one of the most mobile of the Carolingian kings, was politically incapacitated by illness at any point in his reign. Nor, by the same token, is it justifiable to string these examples together to support a claim that he was in general a 'weak' or 'sickly' individual.

This is, however, exactly what modern historiography has done in order to deprive the emperor of agency and to put him at the mercy of the supposedly momentous and inexorable historical trends of the late ninth century. Regino was not so dismissive. He thought that Charles's illness had only become politically significant at the very last minute, when his men had turned up at the November assembly in Tribur to find that 'non modo vires corporis, verum etiam animi sensus ab eo diffugere.'²⁸ Now, he says, and only now, they acted and called for Arnulf. This report is more convincing as evidence of a politically-significant illness, as we know that Charles's resistance crumbled and that he was dead from natural causes in a matter of weeks. Regino has, like any historian, an angle, but he is careful here to put the events of 887 into some kind of context, while modern authors have been content to fall back on long-held assumptions about the rise of the aristocracy, the struggle for imperial unity and the weakness of the emperor. Regino does not write Charles the Fat out of the history of his own reign, as others have been inclined to do; this is why he could be so stunned at the speed with which things turned sour for the Carolingians in the late 880s, while an additional 1100 years of hindsight have made it all look to others somewhat inevitable. The rest of this chapter, then, is an attempt to go against the grain of what I have argued is the prevalent historiographical view, and to explain the events of the years 885-7 as facets of contemporary politics rather than as the visible fragments of some rumbling subterranean process of long-term historical change. Because the authors of the main contemporary annalistic sources were all interested parties in one way or another, their narrative frameworks are untrustworthy when adopted alone. The approach here will therefore be to attempt to contextualise the political

²⁷ On which see below, c.6.5.

²⁸ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.197.

positions of the main actors in the drama (the imperial couple Charles and Richgard, the rival archchancellors Liutbert and Liutward, the usurpers Hugh and Arnulf, and the would-be kings Bernard and Louis) in order to propose a hypothesis tying together the course of events over these three crucial years. From this, the key issue which will emerge is that staple problem of early medieval dynastic politics, the ordering of the royal succession.

6.2: The attempted legitimization of Bernard, August-October 885

885 marked a high point in the reign of Charles the Fat, whose acquisition of the west Frankish throne in that year reunited the empire under a single ruler for the first time since the death of Louis the Pious. However, the same circumstances which had brought him this dignity with minimal effort, namely the chance deaths of every other adult male legitimate Carolingian, posed anew the problem which had been thought solved by the mutual agreement of 880: how to settle the succession? After the death of Carloman II no legitimate adult male Carolingians remained who could be expected to succeed in the long term, while Charles's own marriage had been barren for over 20 years and hence looked to be an unlikely source of a solution. The claims of three surviving illegitimate sons of kings, Hugh of Lotharingia, Arnulf of Carinthia and Charles's own son Bernard, thus came seriously into consideration for the first time.

Charles's first attempt at a solution was to have his bastard son legitimised so that he could be designated as an heir. Our only direct narrative source for this is the vitriolic pen of the Mainz annalist, who records that Charles '*Voluit enim, ut fama vulgabat, quosdam episcopos inrationabiliter deponere et Bernhartum filium suum ex concubina haeredem regni post se constituere; et hoc, quia per se posse fieri dubitavit, per pontificem Romanum quasi apostolica auctoritate perficere disposuit*'.²⁹ The reference to the rumour of deposing bishops is probably principally a reflection of the opposition to the plan of the annalist's patron Liutbert of Mainz, fearful of a perpetuation of his exclusion from court.³⁰ It is nonetheless also a clear demonstration of how illegitimacy of birth could be used

²⁹ AFC s.a. 885, p.103.

as grounds for opposition to a royal designation. This, an idea successfully used by the Carolingians to limit the number of royal claimants, came in the end to be Charles's greatest weakness.

We can speculate on what role Charles had in mind for Bernard for the immediate future. We know that the meeting with the pope was scheduled for Worms in October, and that, at this assembly, Charles held talks 'cum episcopis et comitibus Galliarum.'³¹ It was highly unusual for the emperor to convene such an assembly for a specific group of magnates in a *regnum* outside their own.³² He must therefore have had a special reason for demanding that they travel to Worms, and given the purpose of the assembly it seems highly likely that this reason was the acquisition of their consent to the legitimation of Bernard prior to his being set up over them as subking. Who exactly were these bishops and counts? The authors of the *Annales Fuldenses* and its continuations employ no consistent usage for the geographical term 'Gaul'; sometimes it refers to Charles the Bald's kingdom, sometimes to everything west of the Rhine. It could, however, also be used to imply Lotharingia alone, especially when it was being referred to as a political unit. Therefore the Mainz annalist reported in 879 that Hugh of Lotharingia was 'tyrannidem in Gallia exercebat' while Zwentibald's Lotharingian kingdom is described by the Bavarian annalist in 900 as 'Gallicanum regnum'.³³ With this in mind it is interesting to note that the only delegation we can definitely say was present at Worms was from the east Lotharingian monastery of St-Maximian at Trier.³⁴ This foundation was, to judge from the struggles focused on it during the subsequent decade, the main *honor* which had to be controlled by any

³⁰ The attempted deposition of bishops was also the main grounds for Liutbert's opposition to the divorce of Lothar II (and the associated legitimation of Hugh): Carroll, 'Archbishops', pp.131-5.

³¹ BC s.a. 885, p.113 for the assembly; AFC s.a. 885, p.103 for the Gauls. The AFC claim that Charles only sent envoys to the pope from his assembly at Frankfurt in September is implausible: since Hadrian died en route to east Francia in August or September (Davis, *Lives*, p.297, n.3), there would not have been time for the imperial envoys to reach Rome with their invitation. The BC account, which specifies Worms as the place of the meeting, and implies that it had been planned before Charles's return from the west, is therefore preferable. The emperor presumably sent envoys to the pope while he waited to cross the Alps to Grand. D CIII 133 shows he was at Worms by 1 October.

³² Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, p.24.

³³ AF s.a. 879, p.93; BC s.a. 900, p.134.

³⁴ D CIII 133.

prospective ruler of Lotharingia.³⁵ It is, therefore, a plausible suggestion that Charles invited these *primores* to the papal assembly at Worms because he hoped to establish Bernard with the consent of all present as subking of Lotharingia, presumably when he had come of age. If this was the case it would explain the cryptic comment of Notker in the *Gesta Karoli*, a text shot through with observations on Charles the Fat's succession arrangements, when referring to the sacking of Lotharingia's other principal royal monastery, Prüm, by the Vikings: 'quam [Prüm's destruction] antea non absolvam quam Bernhardulum vestrum spata femur accinctum conspiciam.'³⁶ In this measure, as in the motivations behind the Vienne agreement of 880, we can see again that control of Lotharingia, a *regnum* rich in royal estates and political prestige, was perceived as a key priority by the rulers of the late Carolingian empire.

A further insight into the whole affair is provided by a charter issued on 28 August 885 at the monastery of Lorsch in favour of the church of Langres.³⁷ Among the conditions of the grant were that the bishop was to hold an annual feast to commemorate the emperor and his consecration, the first charter of an east Frankish king to make such a specification. He was also to ensure the performance of regular prayers for Charles, his wife, his *antecessores*, his offspring ('proles nostra') and the stability of the whole empire. Significantly, the provision of prayers for the royal progeny, while a staple element of Carolingian prayer formulas, was only formally introduced into Charles's charters in the year 885, after the death of Carloman II and the consequent inception of the plan to legitimise Bernard.³⁸ This particular charter, moreover, was the first one in

³⁵ Innes, *State*, pp.226-7.

³⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.12, p.74. Interestingly, Karlmann's sub-regnal authority in Lotharingia around 870 was partly expressed by his petitioning of a charter for Prüm: D LG 141; see above, c.1.2.

³⁷ D CIII 129.

³⁸ DD CIII 111, 117, 123, 129 (all 885), 135, 147, 149 (all 886), 153 (887). 'Proles' provisions do appear in three charters from before 885, DD 28, 35 and 62, but all are literal copies of earlier models from the reigns of Louis the Pious and Karlmann of Bavaria. Their significance is offset by DD 37 and 102, which are also literal copies of earlier charters but which programmatically exclude the word 'proles' which did feature in their models; see Ewig, 'Gebetsdienst', p.75. Evidently there was a will in the chancery to keep the word out, even if supervision was not strict enough to stop over-zealous scribes sometimes copying it back in. Equally, after 885, the conscious effort to include the word is clear, as shown by D 135 for the church of Passau. Its formulas were a literal repeat of those in D 134, issued only three days earlier for the same institution, in which the word 'prolis' in the prayer clause was the only new addition: clearly the scribe had mistakenly left it out in the earlier document and smartly corrected himself in the latter.

Charles's reign to link prayers for his *antecessores* to those for his *proles*. It thus has a uniquely dynastic feel. This is made even more obvious when one remembers that 28 August was the anniversary of Louis the German's death, and that Lorsch was the site of his tomb. Behind this document, therefore, probably lies some sort of ceremony held by the emperor in which he tried to connect the unquestionable legitimacy of the past generations of his dead family to his son Bernard, emphasising a dynastic continuity.³⁹

The cloisters of Lorsch rang with several other even more recent dynastic associations which enhanced its suitability as the venue for this performance. Louis the Younger had had his father laid to rest there in 876 and it seems he began to promote it as a family mausoleum for the east Frankish line, providing a focus of Carolingian legitimacy in the heart of his own kingdom.⁴⁰ He interred his son Hugh (d.880) there, and constructed a new entrance hall which may have served as a triumphal arch on the procession route to the tombs themselves.⁴¹ In 882 Louis the Younger himself found his final resting place at the monastery.⁴² Moreover, the Lorsch calendar records liturgical commemoration of both Louis the German's death and Louis the Younger's subsequent victory over Charles the Bald at the battle of Andernach.⁴³ Already in June 884 Charles the Fat had begun to tap into this rich seam of east Frankish dynastic legitimacy by ordering an eternal flame to be maintained at the tombs of his father and brother for the good of all their souls.⁴⁴

This promotion of legitimacy was highlighted further in the 885 charter for Langres by the narrative section's detailing of how the properties involved had been usurped by 'quorundam principum tyrannica sacrilegaque'. This phrase provides a direct contrast between the legitimate ruler, restoring the properties to the wronged church in return for dynastic commemoration, and the illegitimate

³⁹ This kind of artificial emphasising of a particular dynastic lineage for political reasons is a feature of several late Carolingian charters: cf., for instance, D CIII 27 for Louis II's burial church; D AC 70 for Lorsch; D K 4, which mentions Louis II, Charles the Bald and Louis the German. For comments see Ewig, 'Gebetsdienst', pp.53, 73, 76 and passim; Schieffer, 'Väter', pp.162-4.

⁴⁰ Fried, *Ludwig*, p.13; see also Innes, 'Kings', pp.318-9.

⁴¹ Jacobsen, 'Torhalle'.

⁴² AF s.a. 882, p.97.

⁴³ McCormick, *Victory*, pp.361-2.

⁴⁴ D CIII 103.

tyrannus, who had removed the lands by force in the first place. The location of Langres on the edge of Lotharingia and the date of late summer 885 make an identification of this ‘tyrant’ with the recently captured usurper Hugh of Lotharingia very tempting. The chronology of his rebellion, which will be discussed in section 6.4, allows the suspicion that he may have been forced to attend the Lorsch ceremony prior to his trial at Frankfurt. This charter may thus stand as witness to an attempt by Charles the Fat to not only assert and emphasise the dynastic legitimacy of his son Bernard, but to contrast it with the tyrannical illegitimacy of his cousin Hugh.

These ideological messages were intended to prime their audience for the formal legitimising of Bernard by the pope at Worms in October. Every resource was being tapped in support of a move which lacked a better precedent than that of Lothar II, and was by no means guaranteed to succeed. Unfortunately for him, the effectiveness of Charles’s pro-Bernard propaganda did not have a chance to be tested: Pope Hadrian III died on the road before even making it out of Italy.⁴⁵ Before considering the consequences of this turn of events for Charles, however, we must examine the positions of the other potential claimants to the throne at this pregnant moment in the politics of the imperial succession, namely Hugh of Lotharingia and, firstly, Arnulf of Carinthia.

6.3: The position of Arnulf, 876-85

After tracing the descent line of the Carolingian dynasty from 840 down to 881 in his continuation of the chronicle of Erchanbert, Notker the Stammerer surveyed the configuration of rulers in his own time with something approaching optimism. In the west he was glad to see the line of Charles the Bald culminate in the young and vigorous kings Louis III and Carloman II, to whom he referred as ‘*spes Europae*’. In his own eastern kingdom, meanwhile, Notker’s appreciation of the regal qualities of both Louis the Younger and Charles the Fat was tempered by nagging doubts over their lack of heirs. For the long-term survival of the line of Louis the German, he chose to place his hopes on the shoulders of the late

⁴⁵ AFC s.a.885, p.103.

Karlmann's illegitimate son Arnulf: 'O! Utinam vivat, ne extinguatur lucerna magni Ludovici de domno Domini!'⁴⁶

The monk of St-Gall backed up this hope by trying to counteract the memory of Arnulf's illegitimate birth (c.850) with a heavy stress on the nobility of his mother Liutswind.⁴⁷ Indeed, his status as an honorary full Carolingian may have originally been pushed forward by Karlmann, who lacked other sons and probably initially intended Arnulf to succeed him in Bavaria at least.⁴⁸ This intention is perhaps reflected in a Regensburg charter from Karlmann's reign, which gives Arnulf the designation 'filius regalis'.⁴⁹ This unusual epithet seems to emphasise the son's regality in a more independent way than the customary 'filius regis'. However, Karlmann's plans for his son were hampered by the stroke the king suffered in early 879.⁵⁰ Louis the Younger took advantage by trying to extract the allegiance of as many of the Bavarian leading men as he could, but the situation remained uncertain, as revealed by a Regensburg charter from 879 which is dated by the reigns of all three sons of Louis the German: the drafter clearly had doubts as to who his next king would be.⁵¹ This uneasy situation prevailed after Louis left Bavaria before Easter, when Arnulf seems to have taken over as king in all but name, assuming responsibility for relieving some prominent counts, who were in disagreement with him and his father, of their *honores*. At about the same time, with all parties staking their claims and illness forcing Karlmann to try to regulate his succession definitively, the king started to include Arnulf in the prayer provisions of his charters, probably reflecting an attempt to bolster his son's position further.⁵² However, the aggrieved counts appealed to Louis, who duly moved east in November and started to rule by returning their offices. Clearly, there were differences of opinion among the Bavarians as to who should succeed which divided the nobles there as long as Karlmann remained as a lame duck

⁴⁶ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330.

⁴⁷ Ibid: 'nobilissima femina.' On her, see Schieffer, 'Karl', pp.135-6. Cf. Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.880, p.116, who also appeals to the nobility of Arnulf's mother, along with the resonances of his name, to bridge the legitimacy gap.

⁴⁸ Schieffer, 'Karl', p.137.

⁴⁹ D Reg 86.

⁵⁰ AF s.a.879, p.92.

⁵¹ D Reg 92.

⁵² D K 27 from August; see Ewig, 'Gebetsdienst', p.73 with n.274.

ruler. Ultimately, however, these differences were resolved when the latter, too ill to oppose his brother, formally abdicated in Louis's favour, commending Arnulf to him along with the kingdom.⁵³

Although deprived by Louis of the regnal authority which he had enjoyed in the summer and autumn of 879, Arnulf still occupied the position he had earlier filled while Karlmann ruled actively: Regino specifies this as control of Carinthia.⁵⁴ We can supplement the abbot of Prüm's report with that of the Bavarian continuator for 884, where it is stated that Arnulf 'Pannoniam tenuit'.⁵⁵ However, certainly by 884 parts of Pannonia were controlled by the Frankish client *dux* Brazlavo (between the Sava and Drava rivers) and the margrave Arbo (along the Danube), so this evidence requires some refining. A charter dating from between 876 and 880 may allow us to be more specific concerning Arnulf's territory. It records a transaction as part of which the deacon Gundbato handed over to St-Emmeram in Regensburg his property at Quartinaha in Pannonia, 'domino suo Arnolfo filio regali permittente, a quo eam in possessionem accepit'.⁵⁶ We know from the *De Conversione Bagoariorum et Carantanorum Libellus* (c.871) that Quartinaha had previously been in the possession of the Slav *dux* Kocel (or Chezil).⁵⁷ Kocel, and before him his father Pribina, were client princes of the Carolingians whose power base lay in Lower Pannonia, focused on the fortress of Moosburg just west of Lake Balaton, where many of their properties, including Quartinaha, were concentrated.⁵⁸ This evidence therefore provides a hint that Arnulf had been installed in this extended Lower Pannonian realm, which retained both its cohesion and its importance through to his reign

⁵³ AF s.a.879, pp.92-3 for the above events. AB s.a.879, p.238 and AS s.a.878, p.742 also record aspects of the fracas. D LY 13 is the proof that Louis was in Regensburg in November. Whatever the original cause of the dispute with the counts, it demonstrates an opposition to the succession of Arnulf, which was clearly feared to be realistic at the time.

⁵⁴ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.880, p.117: 'Concessit autem idem rex [Louis] Arnulfo Carantanum, quod ei pater iam pridem concesserat.'

⁵⁵ BC s.a.884, p.112. Bertels, 'Carantania', pp.165-8, speculates that Regino implicitly included Pannonia in his use of the unusual term 'Carantanum'. For the following, see Map 4.

⁵⁶ D Reg 86.

⁵⁷ *De conversione*, p.14.

⁵⁸ Moosburg is at modern Zalavár in Hungary, and is not to be confused with the fortress of the same name in Carinthia. On the establishment of Pribina and Kocel's lordship see *De Conversione*, pp.11-4 and Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.104-7.

proper, in succession to Kocel, who probably died in 875.⁵⁹ The immediate benefit of this arrangement had been that it provided protection on the east side for Karlmann's expeditions into Italy, some of which were launched from Carinthia.⁶⁰ We can also appreciate from the Gundbato charter that Arnulf's authority in Pannonia under Karlmann and probably Louis was quite considerable, and extended to the (royal) prerogative of distribution of significant properties.

A renewal and slight enhancement of Gundbato's charter in the 880s confirms that Arnulf retained control of this strategically important lordship under Charles the Fat, whose succession to Bavaria in 882 he does not seem to have objected to.⁶¹ This document was promulgated in Pannonia itself before legates of the bishop of Regensburg and 'in presentia Arnulfi ducis'. The use of the designation 'dux' here tallies with the epithet 'princeps' applied to Arnulf by the Bavarian annalist in his account of the Asselt campaign led by Charles in 882.⁶² Both these words imply a kind of military responsibility which is commensurate with his control of the south eastern marches as well as with the statement of the Bavarian annalist (who, it was argued in chapter 2, may well have been a participant and was thus in a position to know) that he commanded the whole Bavarian army on the Asselt campaign. Therefore, although the charter of confirmation does not, like the original, highlight Arnulf's association with full royal authority with a term like 'filius regalis', his initial position under Charles the Fat was powerful and important, at least militarily.⁶³

⁵⁹ Wolfram, *Geburt*, p.290 with n.2 for Kocel's death date. The enduring cohesion of the Pannonian command focused on Moosburg is demonstrated by BC s.a. 896, p.130, where we learn that Arnulf placed it temporarily in the hands of the Slavic *dux* Brazlavo to defend it from the escalating effects of the struggle between the Magyars and Bulgars. Arnulf often stayed at Moosburg in the early years of his reign: see Bowlus, 'Early History' for exegesis of his itinerary. D Reg 86 also reveals that Kocel had had properties as far north and west as the Raba river, properties which now came into the hands of Arnulf's man Gundbato. If the Raba marked the boundary of Kocel/Arnulf's realm, it would explain why it was the terminal point for the ravages of his enemy Zwentibald in the war of 882-4: BC s.a. 884, p.113.

⁶⁰ Bowlus, *Franks*, p.201.

⁶¹ D Reg 102.

⁶² BC s.a. 882, p.107.

⁶³ The *Annales Fuldenses* and its continuations are silent about events on the eastern frontier during the 880s (with the exception of the Wilhelminer war): this may be a sign that Charles had been happy to delegate management of the region to Arnulf.

However, we should not, as did Tellenbach, take this to mean that Arnulf was the dominant figure in the politics of the whole Bavarian *regnum*.⁶⁴ Recent research by Bühner-Thierry has drawn attention to the fact that the 11 charters of Charles the Fat for Bavarian recipients, a not inconsiderable number in view of the length of his reign there, all share the anomaly of having been promulgated without mention of intercessors.⁶⁵ She argues convincingly on the basis of this evidence that Charles dealt directly with Bavaria's high ecclesiastics, who were the charters' chief beneficiaries and who formed a self-contained group which rarely influenced events in other *regna*.⁶⁶ The emperor, moreover, proved more than capable of intervening decisively in this episcopal circle, as shown in 884 when he installed the royal notary Waldo in the see of Freising, a position normally monopolised by a powerful local aristocratic family.⁶⁷ In these substantial relationships between the emperor and influential churches and individuals in the Bavarian heartland, which constituted a continuation of Louis the German's practices of ruling this region, Arnulf seems to have played no part whatsoever.⁶⁸ By contrast, many of these churches controlled extensive estates in Carinthia and Pannonia which were crucial to Carolingian control of those regions and the support of passing royal armies.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, if Arnulf was not the only political force in Bavaria and the marches, his position early in Charles's reign there looks significant when compared with that of his father before 876. Karlmann was also regarded as a *dux* in the south-eastern marches, but his authority did not, unlike Arnulf's, transcend the boundaries of Carinthia.⁷⁰ Karlmann, like his brothers and later son, was not designated with a royal title, and was also confined by and large to military responsibility for his *regnum*.⁷¹ Because before 884 Louis III and Carloman II

⁶⁴ Tellenbach, 'Geschichte', pp.231-3.

⁶⁵ Bühner-Thierry, 'Évêques', pp.37-40, where she lists only ten charters, omitting D CIII 59 for the monastery of Metten, although this does not negatively affect her argument.

⁶⁶ D CIII 113, the only one for a layman, fits the theory since its recipient Witagowo had been a partisan of Charles during the Wilhelminer war of 882-4: see Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.292-3, 298.

⁶⁷ Bühner-Thierry, 'Évêques', pp.39-40.

⁶⁸ On Louis's relationship with the Bavarian episcopate, see Fried, 'Kingdoms', pp.148-9.

⁶⁹ Most notable was Freising: Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.139, 170, 185, 329.

⁷⁰ AF s.a. 863, p.56 says he was 'praelatus Carantanis'; see also above, c.1.2.

⁷¹ Titles like *dux* and *princeps* used for Arnulf were also applied to Louis the German's sons before 876; see c.1.2.

remained ahead of him in the queue for the throne, Arnulf, and presumably his admirers like Notker, cannot have been dissatisfied with the role assigned to him by his uncle.

The honeymoon period was not to last long. Arnulf's relationship with Charles was terminally damaged by the so-called Wilhelminer war, a long account of which dominates the Bavarian continuator's annal for 884.⁷² The roots of the trouble reached back to 871, when Louis the German had appointed a certain Arbo to the command of a key part of the eastern frontier on the Danube, stretching from the Traungau along to the Vienna basin, then south-east to Szombathely and the Raba river.⁷³ The sons of the previous incumbents, the celebrated margraves William and Engelschalk, took exception to this state of affairs, and in the reign of Charles the Fat began a campaign to eject Arbo, which met with initial success. Arbo appealed for, and received, help from both the Moravian *dux* Zwentibald and the emperor, who reinstalled him in his command. Zwentibald then escalated the scale of the conflict by invading Pannonia and mutilating one of the sons, revenge, the annalist tells us, both for the harm done to Arbo and for the injuries done to the Moravians by the late margraves William and Engelschalk. This caused the remaining sons to withdraw from the authority of Charles the Fat in order to become the men of Arnulf. Arnulf refused to swear oaths of peace with Zwentibald, or to hand over the sons, to which the Moravians responded with further invasions. Finally, after the conflict had taken up the best part of two and a half years, the emperor himself turned up in late 884 and received Zwentibald as his man at the Kaumberg near Tulln, receiving promises of peace and fidelity.⁷⁴ The Slavic *dux* Brazlavo was also received as Charles's man on this occasion.⁷⁵ Peace was not sealed between Arnulf and the Moravians until the latter part of the following year.⁷⁶

Some important points concerning Charles's relationship with Arnulf emerge from this protracted feud. Firstly, the emperor's will concerning eastern

⁷² BC s.a. 884, pp.110-3. For commentary see Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.208-16.

⁷³ Ibid, p.208; Wolfram, *Geburt*, p.289.

⁷⁴ BC s.a. 884, p.113: 'Veniens Zwentibaldus dux cum principibus suis, homo, sicut mos est, per manus imperatoris efficitur'.

⁷⁵ See Wolfram, *Geburt*, pp.355-7 on him.

⁷⁶ BC s.a. 885, p.114.

frontier comital appointments prevailed: Arnulf, as in the Bavarian episcopate, had no rights as far as redistributing *honores* went. Admittedly, the cost was unusually high, but then dispossessing the scions of an established margrave family was an unusually bold decision, considering that more normal Carolingian tactics would have been to rubber stamp the status quo. Moreover, despite his obvious distress at the whole affair, and his particular hatred for the Moravians, who acted on behalf of Arbo and eventually Charles, the Bavarian annalist ultimately blamed the sons, stating that the tragedy had come about ‘per antefactum puerile consilium.’⁷⁷ Secondly, it is clear that Arnulf made a conscious decision to stand against Charles when he received the sons as his men after they withdrew from the emperor’s commendation. Opposition to the appointment of Arbo and all that stemmed from it was an act of rebellion, a situation which was publicly recognised when Charles formally acknowledged Zwentibald as his man in 884 at the Kaumberg, which, pointedly, was a key stronghold in Arbo’s lordship.⁷⁸ The Moravian *dux* was (politically and geographically) a natural ally for the emperor against Arnulf, who posed the additional threat of being a potential usurper: the meeting at the Kaumberg did not humble Zwentibald, but rather established him as a Frankish client.⁷⁹ As he and Arnulf were still at war, this also implicitly sanctioned the continuation of the conflict. This display of force and unity must not only have demoralised Arnulf, but also set the seal on the major territorial gains which Zwentibald had made and retained in Lower Pannonia.⁸⁰ The course of the Wilhelminer war is a classic example of the interplay between aristocratic rivalries, royal authority and external peoples which frequently determined the course of events on the Carolingian frontiers.⁸¹ However, its outcome was not, as has been claimed, damaging to Charles the Fat’s authority; rather, his positive intervention ensured that it was a

⁷⁷ BC s.a. 884, p.112. This could also be rendered: ‘through the puerile plan made beforehand’, but the general point still stands.

⁷⁸ A clue to Arnulf’s motives in his vehement opposition to Arbo may be given by the latter’s close family links to Pribina and Kocel: Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.202-8. This may have given him a claim to influence in the Lower Pannonian lordship which threatened Arnulf.

⁷⁹ As Bowlus, *Franks*, p.214 rightly stresses.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.292; Wolfram, *Geburt*, p.292; Notker, *Gesta*, 2.14, p.78 refers to Arnulf’s lands as ‘angustiae.’

⁸¹ Reuter, *Germany*, pp.124-5.

major political setback for his nephew.⁸² The point was emphatically driven home by the route of the emperor's subsequent journey to Italy, on which he pointedly conducted his army through Arnulf's heartland in Carinthia.⁸³

The whole episode demonstrated to Arnulf the practical limits of his authority, much as had the resolutions of similar conflicts between Louis the German and his sons. A crucial difference, however, was that Arnulf was not the ruler's son, nor was he of legitimate birth, and hence he could have no automatic expectation of a share in the governance of the empire. Failure to remain in the emperor's good books was potentially very damaging to any hopes he might have had of succeeding to a throne, and there are some indications that, once the Wilhelminer war brought him to his knees, Charles wanted to keep him there. These are provided by a charter issued by the emperor in favour of the church of Ötting on 25 August 885.⁸⁴ This document records a rather substantial gift of fiscal rights in no fewer than 19 royal *curtes*, in addition to a share of the tolls at two. The estates named are all in eastern Bavaria and Upper Austria, primarily in the complex of royal properties in the Inn-Salzach region. This area had been the springboard for many a campaign into Carinthia and Pannonia in the reigns of Louis the German and, especially, Karlmann, and some of these very estates were regularly involved in provisioning such excursions.⁸⁵ Three of the first four centres named in the charter, Ranshofen, Mattighofen and Atterhofen, were absolutely essential to Carolingian logistical structures on the way to Salzburg and the middle Enns passes.⁸⁶ Others, such as Dingolfing and Loiching on the Isar, were used as staging points on the way from Regensburg down to the Inn-Salzach complex. By giving these rights to the royal chapel at Ötting, the favoured

⁸² Smith, '*Fines*', p.182: 'a devastating blow to Charles the Fat'; cf. Reuter, *Germany*, p.116. We should also note here that by turning against Zwentibald, Arnulf saw a decline in the influence over the Moravian church of his ally bishop Wiching of Nitra, and a consonant increase in the authority of Wiching's rival Methodius, who was present at the Kaumberg with Zwentibald and Charles: Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.214-5. This severing of ecclesiastical links between Arnulf and Zwentibald must have isolated him even more. Methodius may have had a previous meeting with Charles on the Danube in 882: Róna-Tas, *Hungarians*, p.286.

⁸³ BC s.a. 884, p.113; Bowlus, 'Early History', p.561 with n.22.

⁸⁴ D CIII 128 enacted at Waiblingen. See Map 5.

⁸⁵ Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.197-201 offers observations on the region under Karlmann, and see *ibid*, pp.30-2 on the methodology of deducing campaign routes from royal charters.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.84. The other one of the four, Wels, was connected to Mattighofen by road, and was also a key supply point on the route to Carinthia; *ibid*, p.231.

residence and later tomb of King Karlmann, Charles was reinforcing this extensive logistical network and securing its readiness to support a royal army passing through the region.

What makes this gift even more striking is that throughout the previous part of his reign Charles had showed absolutely no interest in the Inn-Salzach area, preferring instead to bolster the properties and privileges of churches on the other major route east, from Regensburg downstream along the Danube and through Arbo's lordship.⁸⁷ This was the path he had taken on his only previous visit to the marches as king, en route to meet Zwentibald in 884 at the Kaumberg, which itself lay on property administered by the church of Regensburg.⁸⁸ The Ötting charter also stands out among Charles's Bavarian diplomas by having been issued in Alemannia: he normally patronised Bavarian institutions only when in that *regnum*.⁸⁹ We may assume, therefore, that his sudden interest in the Ötting network as he passed through Alemannia in August 885 had a particular reason, and the most likely explanation is that he was planning a campaign of some sort across the passes into Carinthia.⁹⁰

Two circumstances allow us to furnish Charles with a motive for deciding at this point to impress Arnulf with another show of force. Firstly, in August 885 Arnulf had still not made peace with the Moravians, and so remained the one volatile element in the configuration of the south-eastern marches: Arbo to his north, Brazlavo to his south, and Zwentibald to his east (between Lake Balaton and the Danube) all stood in confirmed loyalty to the emperor. Secondly, the Ötting charter was enacted only three days before the ceremony held at Lorsch to pave the way for the designation of Bernard as the emperor's heir.⁹¹ The projected campaign which lies behind the Ötting document was thus a product of a time in

⁸⁷ DD CIII 59, 72-5, 107, 113, 127, 134-5.

⁸⁸ DD CIII 107-9 were issued at Regensburg in September 884 on the way to this meeting. D LG 96 for Regensburg's rights in the area. Charles had earlier visited the marches on campaign in 869: AF s.a.869, pp.68-9.

⁸⁹ Bühner-Thierry, 'Évêques', pp.38-9. This is largely true of all Charles's charters, which were only in unusual circumstances issued outside the kingdom they concerned.

⁹⁰ D CIII 127 reveals that Engilmar, abbot of Regensburg and bishop of Passau, was also present at Waiblingen. This is a unique example in Charles's reign of a Bavarian churchman travelling outside his home *regnum* to obtain a charter, and is presumably to be explained by his participation in the planning of this campaign.

⁹¹ See above, c.6.2.

which Charles's thinking was dominated by the resolution of the imperial succession. It was surely intended to pre-empt any resistance Arnulf may have mounted to the Bernard plan, which threatened his own hopes of a crown. Such resistance was all the more likely to be forthcoming because, with the death of the logical and intended successor Carloman II in December 884, the claims of illegitimate Carolingians acquired a new credibility. Since Arnulf had already shown himself willing to rebel over matters of considerably less import, another visit to his heartland from the emperor and his army was a timely measure to take in support of the controversial Bernard plan, and was justified by the fact that Arnulf was still in a state of war with confirmed imperial vassals in the south-east.

We know that Charles had already arranged to meet Hadrian III at Worms in early October to legitimise Bernard, so any campaign could not have proceeded until after that date. Charles eventually spent Christmas and part of January at Regensburg and, given the timescale and the general inaccessibility of Alpine passes in the winter, it seems likely that this pause had been his intention from the beginning.⁹² Here was a built-in opportunity for Arnulf to come to terms with the situation: he took it, making peace with Zwentibald under the watchful eyes of the Bavarian nobles.⁹³ The Bavarian continuator, our source for this agreement, places it at the very end of his annal for 885, after the blinding of Hugh, which probably took place in September.⁹⁴ It is therefore quite likely that Arnulf instigated the peace after hearing that Charles was planning to head east. Ultimately, the emperor never made the crossing into Carinthia, travelling instead to Italy to meet the new pope. We may assume that this was because, after ending his quarrel with the Moravians, Arnulf appeared in Regensburg himself over the festive period and gave satisfaction to his uncle.⁹⁵ He would have been all the readier to do after the initial failure of the Bernard plan caused by the death of the pope, which meant that his hopes of receiving some sort of royal designation himself could be rekindled.

⁹² For itinerary details see AFC s.a.885, p.103; BC s.a.886, p.114; DD CIII 134-5.

⁹³ BC s.a.885, p.114.

⁹⁴ See below, c.6.4.

⁹⁵ The Bavarian annalist's reference to the presence of the Bavarian nobles suggests that Arnulf made this peace at court in Regensburg. See c.6.4 for more on this hypothetical encounter.

It is clear, then, that Arnulf's position changed over time. Having tasted actual royal power as his father's regent in the middle months of 879, he failed to secure the succession but retained his position under Louis the Younger. Initially well-placed under Charles the Fat's authority in a military role analagous to that which had been enjoyed by Karlmann in his younger days, his part in the Wilhelminer war of 882-4 lost him the favour of the emperor as well as large stretches of territory in Lower Pannonia. His fall from grace had, by an unlucky twist of fate, coincided with the deaths of the last legitimate Carolingian rulers: he hit his political nadir just as his claim to share in the imperial succession might have acquired new plausibility. Accordingly, Charles decided to put all his eggs into Bernard's basket, not merely passing over Arnulf but taking active measures to keep him in his place.

That the swift failure of the Bernard plan gave Arnulf new hopes of a return to favour is probable, but Charles showed himself little inclined to satisfy them. By the time Notker the Stammerer came to write his *Gesta Karoli* (885-6), he had lost the cautious optimism he had expressed in 881 for Arnulf's chances of succeeding the heirless Charles the Fat. Now it seemed to him that even Arnulf's military responsibilities had been criminally reduced: 'Gladius vester in sanguine Nordostranorum duratus obsistat, adiuncto sibi mucrone Karlomanni fratris vestri, tincto quidem in eorundem cruore', he said, with an obvious reference to Charles and Arnulf's cooperation at Asselt, 'sed nunc non propter ignaviam sed propter inopiam rerum angustiamque terrarum fidelissimi vestri Arnoldi ita in rubiginem versus, ut tamen iussu et voluntate potentiae vestrae haut difficulter possit ad acumen et splendorem perducī. Hic enim solus ramusculus cum tenuissima Bennolini [Bernard] astula de fecundissima Hludowici radice sub singulari cacumine protectionis vestrae pullulascit.'⁹⁶ Not only was Arnulf's military involvement now limited, but Notker's words imply a perception on his part that Arnulf's chances of succession had been ruled out by the emperor; he exhorted Charles to remember that Arnulf was just as much of the line of Louis the Pious as was Bernard. This point had also been implicit in his *Continuatio*, which traced the descent of the Carolingians from Louis the Pious down to Louis

⁹⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.14, p.78.

the Younger, Charles the Fat and Arnulf. Charles's determined preference for the 'tenuissima astula' (Bernard) over the 'ramusculus' (Arnulf) at a time when the options were so limited exasperated the monk of St-Gall and filled him with great trepidation for the line's continuance.⁹⁷ Notker astutely saw, to continue with his felicitous arboreal metaphor, that the Carolingian family tree was in danger of being toppled unless all of its branches were included. As will become clear, Charles's failure to listen to Notker's advice was his ultimate undoing. In the end, it was his stubborn refusal to consider Arnulf's claims after 885 which would drive his nephew back into rebellion and inspire the fateful coup of November 887.

6.4: The problem of Charles the Fat's consecration and the revolt of Hugh, Sept. 885

The analysis in c.6.2 of the Lorsch charter of August 885 as a weapon in the ideological armoury deployed by Charles in support of the Bernard plan illustrated how royal diplomas can give us valuable evidence for the political agenda of the Carolingian court at particular moments. The prayer clauses by which the Carolingians sought to harness the intercessory power of the church and its martyrs to the worldly success of their own dynasty could also contain coded political messages. The Lorsch charter, as well as providing a clear example of this, also introduces us to another type of formula which, if anything, is even more obviously political, namely that which demands the celebration of significant anniversaries in the lifetime of a ruler. This type of provision, which was founded on late Roman antecedents, achieved its greatest Carolingian currency in west Francia between the reigns of Charles the Bald and Charles the Simple.⁹⁸ Its most striking form was the request for the annual liturgical commemoration of a king's consecration, to be subsequently replaced with that of his death day. The memory of the king's acquisition of his earthly kingdom, and later his entrance to its heavenly counterpart, was thus preserved at major royal churches, and often celebrated with a large-scale banquet provided for by the income from specially

⁹⁷ See below, c.7.5.

designated estates.⁹⁹ These developments represent an escalation in the intensity of political praying in the later ninth century, powered by the Carolingians' desire to imprint a heavier reminder of their presence and authority on the sacred calendar.

Four of Charles the Fat's surviving charters, all from 885 or later, make reference to such arrangements. Three were drawn up by and issued for the west Frankish church of Langres, while the other was for the east Frankish royal monastery of Fulda.¹⁰⁰ All four demand the celebration of the anniversary of Charles's *consecratio* (and then death) with prayers and feasts, with the exception of the middle Langres one which omits the feast. A fifth charter, also datable to 885, details the establishment of a similar commemoration and *refectio* at the monastery of Reichenau, with Charles's approval, by bishop Chadolt of Novara.¹⁰¹ It should be pointed out that this charter was explicitly connected to an imperial confirmation, and that the annual feast it specified was to be provided for from a donated royal estate. It can therefore be read as the by-product of a fifth, now lost, imperial diploma concerned with commemoration. This is entirely consistent with what we know about Chadolt, who had been in the entourage of Charles since the early 870s, and who was the brother of Liutward of Vercelli: he was just the kind of man we would expect to be entrusted with the setting up of an anniversary celebration at a key monastery in the emperor's heartlands.¹⁰² Taken together, these five documents, all of which survive as originals, are the first evidence for the anointing of an east Frankish king and for its commemoration.

⁹⁸ For the background see Kantorowicz, *Laudes*, pp.65-9; Stoclet, 'Dies'. Charles the Bald is the most analysed anniversary celebrator; see for example Wallace-Hadrill, 'Prince', p.166.

⁹⁹ See Nelson, 'Anointed', p.126 on feasts. A vivid literary description of an episcopal feast is provided by Notker, *Gesta*, 1.18, pp.23-4.

¹⁰⁰ Langres: DD CIII 129 (28 August 885), 147 (29 October 886), 153 (15 January 887). Fulda: D CIII 132 (23 September 885).

¹⁰¹ Mabillon, *Vetera Analecta*, p.427. For the 885 dating see Hlawitschka, 'Diptychen', p.777. Erdmann, 'König', p.316, placed it in 883, presumably on the basis of D AC 65, in which Charles's confirmation of the Reichenau charter (now lost) is associated with another imperial confirmation issued in 883 for Chadolt's brother Liutward (D CIII 92). Nothing in Arnulf's charter forces us, however, to assume that the lost confirmation was also enacted in 883. The similarities between the Reichenau charter and D CIII 132 for Fulda are more persuasive as evidence that it too belongs in 885, and this dating fits better with the context outlined below.

¹⁰² For Chadolt in the young Charles's entourage see *Liber Memorialis Romaricensis*, fol.9r; Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, p.195; cf. Zettler, *Klosterbauten*, p.106.

Only two of them, however, those from Fulda and Reichenau, furnish us with a date for this celebration: 'hoc est epiphania domini'.¹⁰³ The question of exactly which consecration of Charles took place on the feast of epiphany (6 January) has exerted and divided scholars for decades.¹⁰⁴ The only plausible candidates are 877 (for the kingdom of Alemannia) and 880 (for the kingdom of Italy): all of Charles's other accessions can be shown to have taken place definitely not on this date. Neither possibility, however, is altogether satisfactory. The existence of an east Frankish consecration tradition in which to place the postulated 877 event, which is purely hypothetical, is disputable.¹⁰⁵ In any case, since Louis the German's sons were not crowned or anointed as kings during his lifetime, it would be difficult to explain why Charles would wait over four months after his father's death to have himself elevated to full royal status, and why this event has left no trace in the sources. The more popular choice of 880 has a slightly stronger case, but one which is still anything but conclusive.¹⁰⁶ The only major narrative source to directly mention Charles's assumption of the Italian kingdom is Notker's *Continuatio*, which does not provide a date, but does tell us that he was made king by the massed bishops and *primores*, including the pope, at Ravenna.¹⁰⁷ There is no reason to doubt Notker, who wrote only a year after the event and probably had an eyewitness report from his regular correspondent, the imperial notary Waldo.¹⁰⁸ However, we cannot definitely place Charles at Ravenna before 11 January, when he renewed a treaty with the Doge of Venice, and the diplomas immediately preceding this seem to show he was still at Pavia on 8 January.¹⁰⁹ On the face of it, Charles was not at Ravenna on epiphany. Scholars have tried to resolve this inconvenient problem by claiming that the earlier diplomas were drawn up at Pavia before 8 January, and then enacted in Ravenna on that date.¹¹⁰ However, this conjecture of so-called 'ununified dating' can be

¹⁰³ D CIII 132. The Reichenau text says 'id est Epiphaniarum die'.

¹⁰⁴ Brühl, 'Krönungsbrauch', pp.298-9 discusses the prior historiography.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, esp. pp.299-303 is a clear discussion of the evidence, ultimately coming down cautiously against.

¹⁰⁶ Sierck, *Festtag*, pp.72-3 is the latest proponent of the 880 theory.

¹⁰⁷ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.329.

¹⁰⁸ Von den Steinen, *Darstellungsband*, p.492.

¹⁰⁹ DD CIII 15-7.

¹¹⁰ See Kehr's preambles to DD CIII 16, 17 and 132.

played more than one way, and in any case seems only to have been deemed necessary on the prior assumption that the later epiphany references must refer to the Italian coronation of 880. The reasoning is circular: we only doubt the dating clauses of the charters because we know Charles was at Ravenna on 6 January 880, but we can only place him there on that day if the dating clauses are wrong. Even then, we cannot be absolutely sure that Charles *was* consecrated king of Italy, although this would not have been out of keeping with Italian practice. Notker only says that ‘ab eis [ie. the pope, bishops and *primores*] rex constituitur’, whereas in the very next breath he does explicitly mention consecration when Charles became emperor in February 881.¹¹¹

Both 6 January 877 and 6 January 880 therefore look somewhat dubious as the anniversary referred to in the later royal charters. An alternative approach to this otherwise intractable problem is to focus our attention instead on the nature and purpose of the commemoration charters themselves. One obvious question to ask, whether 877 or 880 is one’s preferred date, is why it was not until 885 that the anniversary provisions made their first appearance in royal diplomatic. The answer usually given is that the custom was directly imported after Charles became king of west Francia in the early months of that year.¹¹² However, it would be wrong to assume that ideas about rulership travelled around the Carolingian Empire in such a determinedly mechanical fashion.¹¹³ Charles had, after all, been to the court of the arch-anniversary celebrator Charles the Bald himself.¹¹⁴ If the east Frankish court wanted to celebrate the king’s consecration in Alemannia or Italy, we must surely credit its members with enough intelligence to do so without waiting several years for their king to annex west Francia. We should look instead for a political explanation for this development in the form of documents which, as we saw above, were designed to deliver pointed ideological messages.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ The dating practices of Charles’s chancery do not help, because his reign in Italy is habitually dated back to Karlmann’s abdication in November 879: Sierck, *Festtag*, pp.93-4.

¹¹² Eg. Ewig, ‘Gebetsdienst’, p.76; Sierck, *Festtag*, p.79.

¹¹³ For an example of this, see c.6.6 for observations on how formulas of intercession entered the diplomatic traditions of various *regna* at approximately the same time in Charles’s reign.

¹¹⁴ AB s.a.871, p.181.

¹¹⁵ On this subject in general see also Wolfram, ‘Theory’ and Merta, ‘Recht’.

In search of such an explanation, there is a case to be made that historians have been wrong in assuming that the five charters all refer to the same consecration. The suspicion that they do not is raised by the fact that none of the three Langres documents make specific mention of the date of the anniversary, while both the east Frankish ones do. The second Langres charter, D 147, is particularly interesting in this regard. This diploma is a restoration of properties granted by Charles during the siege of Paris in October 886 for the upkeep of the canons in Langres. In return, in addition to their habitual constant intercession on Charles's behalf, the canons would offer up special prayers to commemorate the 'consecrationis nostrae diem, quod est ...[blank space]'. Bishop Geilo, who was the grant's petitioner and who had the charter drawn up by his staff, was, as discussed in chapter 5, a close confidant of Charles in the later years of his reign, and cannot have been ignorant of the date of the emperor's consecration. The missing word must imply, therefore, that Geilo did not know *which* consecration the emperor wanted celebrated, and had his scribes leave a gap to be filled in when he brought the parchment to Charles outside Paris a few weeks later.¹¹⁶

What, then, were the options? D 129, which, as we have seen, was issued at Lorsch for the church of Langres in August 885, displays no such ambivalence, despite being the first charter to mention an anniversary celebration. By its terms, the monks and congregation of Langres were to offer prayers and enjoy a *refectio* laid on by the bishop, in the first instance on Charles's 'die consecrationis', for which no date was specified, and then on the anniversary of his death. The factor which caused doubts to enter Geilo's mind by the following October must have been the intervening royal charter issued in September 885 for Fulda, which specified epiphany as the anniversary date. This is explicable if the drafters of the first Langres charter did *not* have epiphany in mind, but some other date.

The most likely explanation is that Geilo was here referring to Charles's Lotharingian/west Frankish anointing on 20 May 885, over which, as argued above, he had presided himself.¹¹⁷ By establishing the annual commemoration of this event at Langres, Geilo not only exalted the emperor's position there, but he

¹¹⁶ Kehr's introduction to D CIII 147 shows how the charter must have been drawn up in the Langres scriptorium, and not during the actual siege.

also sought to re-emphasise the role of himself and his church in Charles's elevation to the Lotharingian/west Frankish kingship and to bask in the reflected glory. D 129 represents a reference to this ceremony; here at least, then, we can admit an infiltration of west Frankish practice into the court customs of the emperor, not by some automatic process of induction, but in a specific reference to a recent event made by one of its orchestrators.¹¹⁸ However, D 132, the charter issued for Fulda in September 885, reveals that Charles himself had different ideas about the date on which his consecration should be celebrated. The inauguration in this document of a different commemoration on the feast of epiphany shows the court taking a new lead in such matters, and provides the alternative date which confused Geilo and forced him to leave a blank space in composing the charter for the Langres canons in 886.

If, then, the Langres charters do not refer to the epiphany commemoration, the appearance of this celebration in a grant to Fulda requires further explanation. To help us with this, the timing and progress of the revolt of the Lotharingian pretender Hugh is a crucial factor. Hugh (born 855/60), the illegitimate son of Lothar II, had agitated for his paternal kingdom sporadically during the late 870s and early 880s, but since 882 had been at peace with the ruling Carolingians.¹¹⁹ He chose to revolt again in 885, it would seem, because of the succession situation. With Charles now the only adult male legitimate Carolingian, Hugh's claim to a share of the succession was in theory at least as strong as those of his bastard cousins Arnulf and Bernard. Moreover, his hopes were in imminent danger if, as argued above, Charles intended to hand Lotharingia, the *regnum* desired by Hugh and the source of his support, to Bernard.¹²⁰ This not only gave Hugh an immediate reason to rebel, but by the same token also gave Charles a reason to dispose of him on a permanent basis. Hugh was captured, brought into

¹¹⁷ See c.5.2.

¹¹⁸ D CIII 153, enacted 15 January 887, copies the formulas of D 129 literally, and so offers no further evidence on the establishment of imperial commemorations at Langres.

¹¹⁹ Parisot, *Lorraine*, pp.442-77 and Tellenbach, 'Grundlagen', pp.286-8 offer discussions of Hugh's career. See also c.3.3 above.

¹²⁰ Above, c.6.2. Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, p.123 is clear that Hugh was after the 'regnum paternum'. See Parisot, *Lorraine*, p.478 on his supporters.

the presence of the emperor, blinded and then confined to a monastery.¹²¹ Two aspects of the affair demonstrate Charles's particular anxiety to deal decisively with Hugh. One is that, although the *dux* Henry had the main role in the capture of both Hugh and his collaborator Godafrid, only the latter received summary punishment (execution), while the former was brought alive to the emperor for judgement.¹²² The other is that Hugh was blinded and confined to a monastery, a penalty designed to exclude its victim definitively from the chance of succession. It is significant that this punishment had not been inflicted on him after his previous rebellions, but that it *was* in 885, at a pregnant moment in the configuration of the politics of succession.

The sources are not explicit concerning the venue for the judicial proceedings against Hugh, and disagree on the location of his imprisonment. Regino states that Hugh was captured by Henry at Gondreville before being blinded, imprisoned in St-Gall, and then moved, during the reign of Zwentibald, to Prüm; he does not say where the blinding was carried out. The only other authority to offer geographical details is the Mainz annalist, who tells us that Hugh was blinded in the emperor's presence before being confined to the monastery of St-Boniface at Fulda. These accounts, which, by no accident, come from those authors best placed to know, are not mutually exclusive. Regino, who met and tonsured Hugh when he was at Prüm, plays up the Lotharingian context of his capture and exile, adding only that St-Gall was where he was immediately prior to travelling to Prüm in the late 890s. This does not gainsay the information that immediately after his blinding he had been sent to Fulda, a detail which we would expect the Mainz annalist, a member of the entourage of the prelate in whose geographical and jurisdictional hinterland that abbey lay, to know.

We can also reach a firm conclusion as to the venue for the trial. Justice of this kind had to be seen to be done: the first general assembly convened after Hugh's capture and the emperor's return from the west was held at Frankfurt in September. This setting provided the necessary context for a public display of just

¹²¹ References in what follows will be to: Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, pp.123-5; AFC s.a.885, p.103; BC s.a.885, p.114; AV s.a.885, p.57, all of which provide reports of these events.

¹²² This information is given by Regino and the *Annales Vedastini*. The Mainz and Bavarian annalists also report separate judgements, although with no mention of Henry's role.

and legitimate rulership to be mobilised against the recalcitrant bastard.¹²³ The royal palace at Frankfurt was the logical choice in the west of the kingdom for the trial of a usurper. It was a Carolingian site par excellence, with an unbroken tradition as one of the key centres, along with Regensburg, of legitimate rulership stretching back through the reign of Louis the German and beyond. The Mainz continuator implies a connection between the trial of Hugh and this royal assembly by placing them adjacent in his annal, although he writes them up for literary effect as two separate set-pieces.¹²⁴ The same annalist was presumably in attendance as part of the entourage of Archbishop Liutbert, which would explain why he is the sole narrative source for both the assembly and for the details of Hugh's trial.¹²⁵ All this points to the conclusion that Hugh was dealt with at the Frankfurt assembly.

In other words, D 132, the first east Frankish royal charter to establish the commemoration of a king's consecration, was issued on the occasion of Hugh's trial and in favour of the monastery where he would be imprisoned. It ought, therefore, to be read as an ideological statement about royal legitimacy, designed, ultimately, to boost the succession claims of Bernard. Hugh's very person was a bad precedent, a living reminder of the failure of Lothar II to carry out a plan almost identical to the one Charles was undertaking. This would not have gone unnoticed by contemporaries, especially those who, like Liutbert, were inclined to oppose the Bernard plan. Hugh had to be dealt with decisively, before an audience of such people, in a location and manner that stressed the emperor's legitimacy and his own lack of it. The charter must be considered in association with the ceremony which had taken place at Lorsch on 28 August. It is possible

¹²³ AFC s.a.885, p.103 mentions the assembly, where DD CIII 130-2 were issued between 6 and 23 September. AV s.a.885, p.57 implies Hugh was captured just before 25 July. D CIII 127, issued at Waiblingen on 23 August, is the first evidence for Charles's return to the east.

¹²⁴ AFC s.a.885, p.103. The section on Hugh is a self-contained story, the only one in the AFC truly favourable to Charles, of the fitting fate of the rebellious bastard; by contrast, the Frankfurt paragraph forms part of the story of divine scorn for Charles's plan to legitimise Bernard. The stories' differing intentions, and indeed the desire of the author to set up a contrast making an implicit point about the correct and wrong way to treat illegitimate Carolingians, is what forces their separation.

¹²⁵ The annalist provides the unique details that Hugh's uncle was also blinded, and that the rest of their supporters 'equis et armis ac vestibis spoliati vix nudi evaserunt'. This punishment was perhaps intended as a humiliating negation of their badges of nobility, on which see Nelson, 'Knighthood'.

that, as argued in section 6.2, the ‘*princeps tyrannica*’ mentioned in the charter issued on that day was in fact Hugh, taken to Lorsch to help emphasise Bernard’s legitimacy and his own lack of it, before being hauled off to Frankfurt and his fate a few days later.

The point could hardly have been emphasised any more clearly to the *primores* gathered at Lorsch and Frankfurt, before whom the charter’s provisions would have been announced: Bernard was a legitimate Carolingian, Hugh was not.¹²⁶ It was certainly understood by the Mainz annalist, who said that, with Hugh’s imprisonment in Fulda, ‘*finem suae habuit tyrannidis [i.e. illegitimate claim to rule]*’.¹²⁷ Nor would it have been missed by Notker the Stammerer, who in 881 had ended his *Continuatio*, a text detailing the descent of Carolingian legitimacy through the generations after 840, with an anxious admonitory reference to the *tyranni*, Hugh and Boso: ‘*Quos interim, humanae verecundiae consulentes, silentio tegimus, donec vel ad principes terrestrium conversi, veniam pro stultitia sua consequantur, vel, ut perturbatores reipublicae dignum est pati, usque ad cinerem concremati, et in omnem ventum dispersi, cum nominibus vel potius ignominia et memoria sua condemnentur in secula.*’¹²⁸ Notker would have been pleased when the prayers and celebrations of the monks of Fulda on the anniversary of Charles the Fat’s consecration drowned out the solitary protests and pleas for recognition of the sightless tyrant Hugh. This is another case of the clinical brutality which the Carolingians were occasionally given to inflict on their opponents, taking care to justify their actions with high-minded religious and political rhetoric.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Presumably some form of court ceremonial took place on these occasions, although the nature of this is now irretrievable.

¹²⁷ AFC s.a.885, p.103. See 6.3 for the suggestion that Hugh was also at Lorsch in August.

¹²⁸ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330.

¹²⁹ A comparable instance would be the show-trial of Tassilo of Bavaria in 788: see now Airlie, ‘Narratives’. Warner, ‘Ideals’, pp.15-7 discusses a similar occasion from the reign of Otto III. These examples all highlight the fact that very often ideological statements about authority were made to impress specific audiences in quite specific circumstances, and should not necessarily be strung together into a generalised image of ideologically-powered kingship. This is important to keep in mind when studying Carolingian kingship. Even the commemorations established by Charles the Bald were often related to particular points in time: Erkens, ‘*Esther*’, p.35 discusses the wedding anniversary celebrations which were set up in 862 in response to developments in the divorce case of Lothar II. As McCormick, ‘Ceremonies’, p.20 puts it: ‘In a ruler’s outlook, the temporal horizon of the considerations which shaped an individual performance of a ceremony was often limited to days, weeks, or months.’

The court, therefore, decided to establish celebrations on the feast of epiphany at this time for very specific reasons, as an adjunct to the public punishment of Hugh and to make a clear statement about authority and legitimacy to a particular audience. However, we may deduce from the Reichenau charter, whose issuer Chadolt was also very close to the court, as well as from the ambivalent Langres one, that these provisions were then intended to be propagated around other important ecclesiastical foundations in the empire; Fulda was not to be the only place where Charles's kingship was exalted. If this is so, one question remains: why epiphany? If 6 January does not correspond with any actual consecration of Charles the Fat, then it must represent a symbolic celebration invoked for ideological or ceremonial reasons.¹³⁰

By the ninth century, 6 January was firmly established in the west as the festival of three key events from the life of Christ: his reception of the Magi, his baptism, and his first miracle at Cana.¹³¹ The Magi had some interesting associations in contemporary eyes which will detain us here. Since the fifth century they had been interpreted in western thought as kings, and accordingly Jesus, to whom they humbled themselves, was seen as a king over kings. This reading obviously lent itself to ideological uses in connection with imperial aspirations and ideas about Christological kingship; ideas which, as is well known, achieved their fullest expression in Ottonian art. They were nonetheless already present in the Carolingian period: images of empire and triumph associated with the Christ and the Magi are visible in the Utrecht Psalter (c.820s), the Stuttgart Psalter (c.830) and in Charles the Bald's *Codex Aureus* (870), while the implicit identification between Christ and the earthly king also emerges from works like Thegan's *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris* and the text of many a royal

¹³⁰ Kehr, in his preamble to D CIII 132, was forced to a similar conclusion. Even if Charles's celebration does refer to an Italian consecration, which, if it took place, was very near to epiphany, and was Charles's first anointing, we still need to explain its appearance in 885, and why it was chosen in preference to, say, the west Frankish consecration.

¹³¹ Cross and Livingstone, *Dictionary*, pp.554, 1020. On the feast's earlier history see also Holl, 'Ursprung'.

adventus ceremony: the Old Testament may well have dominated the Carolingian Renaissance, but its architects had read the New as well.¹³²

Given these imperial associations, epiphany had specific relevance to Charles the Fat in 885 as a symbol of, and a seal upon, his succession to a new position: sole ruler of the entire territory of the empire of Charlemagne, a physical confirmation and fulfilment of the imperial title he had acquired in 881. Epiphany was not merely a feast of Christ's regality, but also had a confirmatory character, celebrating his reappearance (to the Gentiles) in a new and divinely exalted form. How exactly might these ideas have been intended to be read? In that he had plans to insert Bernard as a subking in Lotharingia, and that he had established client relationships with foreign leaders like Zwentibald of Moravia and Alan of Brittany, Charles may have claimed quite literally to be a king over kings (although admittedly the Carolingians did not usually like to acknowledge the royal status of such rulers).¹³³ There is good evidence, however, that his imperial ideology went further than this. Notker the Stammerer's *Gesta Karoli*, written for Charles at exactly this time (885-6) elaborates a theory of Carolingian power based on the book of Daniel, in which the dynasty is interpreted as the head of a new world empire, securely anchored to the masterplan of sacred history. Their divinely-ordained superiority extended over Byzantium, Africa and the rest of the known world, and it is clear that Notker expected Charles the Fat to identify himself as the incumbent ruler of this notional 'empire' in succession to Charlemagne. Charles, who commissioned the work and may well have influenced its content, is elided with Charlemagne by Notker, and hence designated as head of the world; there is evidence here, then, that the events of 885 inspired the court to pursue a new imperial rhetoric.¹³⁴ It is therefore interesting, and by no means purely coincidental, that the *Gesta Karoli* referred to consecration as an ancient practice which, in east Frankish terms, it certainly was

¹³² Mayr-Harting, *Illumination*, p.68; Deshman, 'Christus rex', pp.375-7; idem, 'Servant', pp.393, 414; Trexler, *Journey*, p.54; Innes, 'Emperor'; Kantorowicz, 'Advent', pp.210-1; idem, *Laudes*, pp.58, 92.

¹³³ See above, cc.4.3 (Alan), 6.3 (Zwentibald).

¹³⁴ On Notker's view of the Carolingian world empire, see especially Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.109-44.

not.¹³⁵ Notker also ascribed God or Christ-like qualities to the Charlemagne he depicted in this work.¹³⁶ Moreover, a further product of the St-Gall scriptorium, the *Psalterium Aureum*, may have been presented to Charles the Fat at exactly this time. Its imperial imagery and depiction of a Carolingian ruler as the Old Testament king David, who was presented as a forerunner of Christ, would also have coincided with the set of ideas about imperial authority being expounded by Charles's court in 885.¹³⁷

There is also a context in which to place Charles's attempt to crystallise these abstract ideas into the court ceremonial which must lie behind our charters' epiphany references.¹³⁸ An indirect influence came from the east, where Byzantine imperial ritual accorded prominence to epiphany at this time: it was one of the major feasts of the Byzantine liturgical year and was celebrated in Constantinople (according to the *Book of Ceremonies*) with imperial processions and acclamations.¹³⁹ We know that Byzantine ceremonial was not only understood but indeed imitated at the court of Louis the German after his diplomatic contact with Basil I in the early 870s.¹⁴⁰ However, epiphany was not only the feast of the Magi, it was also the feast of Christ's baptism: to ninth-century western minds he was not only revealed as a king over kings on that day, he was also consecrated. A source for this idea lay much closer to home than Constantinople, at the Alemannic monastery of St-Gall, home to Notker the Stammerer. In late 884 he had sent his famous sequence book, known as the *Liber Ymnorum*, to Charles's archchaplain Liutward so that it could be used at court to celebrate the liturgy on the high feast days of the church.¹⁴¹ In the hymn to be sung on epiphany, the section on the baptism of Christ is shot through with the

¹³⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.10, p.13; Goetz, *Strukturen*, p.23, n.65.

¹³⁶ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.79-89; Innes, 'Emperor'.

¹³⁷ Eggenberger, *Psalterium*. I develop these points below, c.7.6.

¹³⁸ Kantorowicz discusses the feast as an important focus for court ceremonial from the late Roman Empire up to the late middle ages in two articles, 'Oriens Augusti' and 'Dante's "Two Suns"', but states that it fell into disuse in the early medieval west.

¹³⁹ Kantorowicz, 'Oriens Augusti', pp.149-62; Kazhdan, *Dictionary*, p.715. The *Book of Ceremonies*, although a tenth-century text, reveals much about ninth-century practice: see Cameron, 'Construction'. In the east, the reception of the Magi was celebrated on 25 December rather than epiphany.

¹⁴⁰ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.11, pp.68-70; Goldberg, 'Kingship', pp.71-2.

language of consecration as it was used in Carolingian inauguration ceremonies: he is 'consecrating baptism for us' (*consecrans nobis baptismum*) and is 'to be anointed over all the saints' (*uncturus sanctis prae omnibus*).¹⁴² The use of these words is striking. Notker was among the first western writers to lay particularly heavy stress on the importance of the feast of epiphany: only three other hymns on epiphany and its octave survive from east of the Rhine in the earlier middle ages, and all come from a circle influenced by the Stammerer.¹⁴³ It is therefore significant that in his *Liber Ymnorum*, ideas about Christ as king of kings and the association with the baptism on epiphany as consecration come together and can be placed at the heart of the imperial court in the mid-880s.¹⁴⁴ Notker did not here provide a coherent programme for imperial ideology, but his work nevertheless contained the full range of associations which clustered around the 'imperial interpretation' of epiphany. The charters in question, therefore, reveal not a reference to an actual consecration, but an ideological statement about Charles's authority inspired by the circumstances of 885.¹⁴⁵

It is hence significant that Charles chose Regensburg, where he overwintered in 885-6, as the first venue for whatever court ceremonies may have accompanied the feast.¹⁴⁶ It has already been argued that Arnulf, still on shaky ground as far as his relationship with Charles went, was probably present at this court to make good his faith with the emperor and ward off a potential imperial invasion of Carinthia.¹⁴⁷ Having marshalled the ideological and ceremonial trappings of rulership to support his legitimation of Bernard's claim and his destruction of Hugh's, we ought not to be surprised if Charles now sought to aim such resources in the direction of Arnulf, the third would-be king.

¹⁴¹ That the book was intended for use in this way is suggested by the fact that Notker sent it to the archchaplain, and by what seem to be quite practical directions for use in the text: eg. Notker, *Liber Ymnorum*, p.10. Von den Steinen, *Darstellungsband*, pp.504-7 for the work's date.

¹⁴² Notker, *Liber Ymnorum*, pp.22-3.

¹⁴³ Von den Steinen, *Darstellungsband*, pp.286-90. For an example see the anonymous *In Octava Theophaniae* edited by von den Steinen, *Editionsband*, p.103.

¹⁴⁴ For Christ as 'regnator' and 'rex regum', see also Notker, *Liber Ymnorum*, pp.42, 46, 88-9.

¹⁴⁵ McCormick, 'Ceremonies', pp.9-10 discusses analogous examples from late antiquity in which depictions of political rituals were 'meant to symbolise a conception of imperial victoriousness' rather than refer to actual events. Charles's situation in 885 also bears some comparison with the English king Edgar's 'imperial' consecration of 973: see Nelson, 'Rituals', pp.297-303.

¹⁴⁶ AFC s.a.885, p.103; BC s.a.886, p.114 for Charles's Christmas 885 stay in Bavaria. He issued D CIII 134 at Regensburg on 7 January 886.

Interestingly, we know from one of the chronicles describing Arnulf's successful coup against Charles in November 887 that Arnulf had previously sworn fidelity to the emperor on a relic of the True Cross, an item which Charles now sent back to his nephew in a last-ditch effort to remind him of his obligations.¹⁴⁸ This relic had been at the east Frankish court since it was brought to Louis the German by Byzantine ambassadors in 872, at his court in Regensburg, on epiphany.¹⁴⁹ Charles the Fat inherited the fragment, and kept it in a most unusual reliquary of which the eleventh-century St-Gall house historian Ekkehard IV provides a detailed description (he had seen it because Arnulf donated the reliquary to the monastery after Charles's death). It was a container of pure gold, decorated with precious stones and fashioned in the shape of a chapel. It was inscribed with the words: 'See the cask of the cross and of holy Mary with the saints. This Charles chose to have [as] his highest chapel.'¹⁵⁰ 'Summa capella' (highest chapel) was a term characteristically used to describe the royal chapels of the Carolingian empire, located at Aachen, Regensburg and Frankfurt, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The ur-chapel, Charlemagne's palace chapel at Aachen, was sacked by Vikings in the early 880s (they used it as a stable), and we have a subsequent charter relating how its relic collection was rescued by the monks of nearby Stavelot-Malmedy and brought to the court of Charles the Fat, who rewarded the industrious brethren with a generous gift of land.¹⁵¹ Might not this reliquary, shaped like a chapel, called 'summa capella' and inscribed with a

¹⁴⁷ See above, c.6.3.

¹⁴⁸ AFC s.a.887, p.106. Historians (such as Schieffer, 'Karl', p.138) have usually assumed that this is a reference to an oath sworn by Arnulf when Charles inherited the Bavarian kingdom in 882. However, our sources (AFC s.a.882, p.98 and BC s.a.882, p.107) do not mention Arnulf specifically, saying only that Charles received the commendations of the leading men. Moreover, if, as Goldberg, 'Kingship' plausibly argues, the relic of the True Cross was carried round with the court, which would have been in keeping with the standard Carolingian use of portable chapels and reliquaries, then it would probably not have come into Charles the Fat's possession until he subsequently moved on to Franconia, where his predecessor Louis the Younger had died and was buried. In addition, a loyalty oath sworn on such an important relic is more appropriate to Arnulf's return to favour in 885-6 than to a simple commendation.

¹⁴⁹ AF s.a.872, p.75.

¹⁵⁰ Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.10, p.34: 'En crucis atque piaie cum sanctis capsula Mariae, Hanc Karolus summam delegit habere capellam'. The cask was described in similar terms by a later interpolator of Notker's *Gesta Karoli* who (wrongly) attributed it to Charlemagne: Notker, *Gesta*, p.15, n.r..

¹⁵¹ AF s.a.881, p.97; D CIII 64. The relics are described as 'pignora sanctorum'. Kehr's doubts over the relevant section of this charter do not seem justified: see also Falkenstein, *Karl*, p.115, n.357.

dedication to the Mother of God have been created to house the Aachen chapel relics along with the fragment of the True Cross?¹⁵² This looks to have been intended as a miniature substitute Aachen, quite literally Carolingian legitimacy in a box; and it was on this casket that Arnulf swore fealty to his uncle in Regensburg, probably on epiphany 886.¹⁵³ The ideological connotations of this are clear: the event highlighted Charles's legitimacy and his nephew's lack of it, sending a clear message to the magnates of Bavaria and Carinthia who formed Arnulf's potential constituency and who were no doubt gathered for the occasion. In other words, the propagandistic trappings to the ordering of the imperial succession which were concocted in late 885 were targetted at belittling the claims of Arnulf of Carinthia and his supporters as well as those of Hugh of Lotharingia and his; and hence were designed to bolster the position of Bernard in the eyes of the aristocratic community.

In conclusion, it is worth stressing two points and registering a caveat. Firstly, if the 885-6 royal charters referring to the supposed consecration of Charles the Fat are to be understood properly, they must be read in the context of the very specific political circumstances which produced them and gave them meaning: they are intricately bound up with the question of the imperial succession. In a sense, this *did* represent the importing of a west Frankish tradition into east Frankish politics, but also a reinterpretation and reuse of this tradition in a quite different context. Secondly, this should be taken as evidence for a lively interest in political ideas at Charles the Fat's court, at least at this one point in time. Neither he nor any other east Frankish king exercised their authority unthinkingly or in the blinkered fashion which has sometimes been assumed.¹⁵⁴ The absence of an east Frankish Hincmar, an annalist who was also closely involved in actually orchestrating political rituals, is very significant. To some extent, the unusually high 'ritual profile' of Charles the Bald's reign is down

¹⁵² On portable chapels in general, see Schramm and Mutherich, *Denkmale*, p.32.

¹⁵³ Charles seems never to have visited Aachen. However, he was of course aware of its symbolic importance: D CIII 109, his only charter for the Mother of God chapel there (later 884), was, significantly, issued while he was at the chapel in Regensburg. During the same visit Charles began to foster his connections with Regensburg itself as a centre of legitimate power, having an eternal flame lit for his own soul in the royal chapel: D 107.

¹⁵⁴ Goldberg, 'Kingship' also develops this theme, although it will be evident that I part company from him on his view of Charles the Fat at p.73.

to Hincmar: writers chronicling other reigns, from Charles the Great to Charles the Fat, were simply not as interested.

One good reason for this lack of interest, and this is the caveat, is the fact that rhetoric of this kind, whatever its claims, is not necessarily translated into real authority. Often ideology was used to fill a gap in 'real' authority, and this, in the final reckoning, is how it was with Charles the Fat. The events of 885, especially the accession to the western kingdom, the plan to get the pope to help legitimise Bernard and the clinical elimination of Hugh reveal a high point in the reign, and a great confidence in the conception and exercise of Charles's kingship. In this context, the self-association with the Christological feast of epiphany and the imperial claims reflected in Notker's *Gesta Karoli* make perfect sense. However, Charles's balloon was very quickly punctured by the unexpected death of Pope Hadrian III in September as he made his way north towards his appointment with the emperor and his son. Bernard's position was thus seriously weakened. The succession issue was once again thrown into doubt, and the more time that passed without a credible solution, the greater the anxiety that would worm its way into the minds of the aristocratic political community, priming them for Arnulf's bid for power. However highly he may have conceptualised his own emperorship, and however much effort he may have put into transmitting these ideological messages about legitimacy to the aristocratic audiences at Lorsch, Frankfurt and Regensburg, all the rhetoric came to look like so much empty bluster as long as this fundamental problem remained. Indeed, to some hostile observers the death of Hadrian III was a divine judgement on the unrighteousness of Charles's intentions, an opinion which would surely have gained ground as time passed.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, Arnulf may only have been so willing to come to heel in 886 because the Bernard plan had already failed and he envisaged new possibilities for himself. The atmosphere of unease is nowhere better illustrated than in Book 2 of Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, which is full of portentous warnings about the future of the Carolingian line.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ AFC s.a.885, p.103.

¹⁵⁶ On which see below, c.7.5.

Charles and his advisers must, of course, have realised all this. Accordingly, the ideas about dynastic legitimacy which had accompanied the great optimism and bold plans of summer and autumn 885 were discarded. Notker's *Gesta* was never finished, and as quickly as they had developed, the circumstances which had produced the first east Frankish royal anniversary celebrations disappeared. Lacking the impetus of the court, the commemorations slid into dormancy almost immediately after they had been introduced, except at Langres, where bishop Geilo still occasionally took the opportunity to remind the emperor and his own entourage of the part he had played in consecrating Charles to the western kingdom in 885. However, the fact that the blank space left by Geilo for the consecration date in the October 886 charter for the canons of Langres was never filled in stands as testimony to Charles's lapse of interest and change of fortunes. The dynastic propaganda which had been invoked to support the development of an exalted conception of the imperial role in summer 885 was partly a means to an end; it was of limited use, and even counter-productive, as long as the serious problems surrounding the imperial succession remained unresolved.

6.5: Bernard and Louis of Provence, April-June 887

Hadrian III had met his unexpected end probably in September 885 and, seemingly due to his unpopularity in Rome, was buried in the monastery of Nonantola rather than being taken back to the Holy See.¹⁵⁷ His successor Stephen V was appointed quickly and without direct consultation with the emperor, whose attempt to have him deposed on this technicality failed because Stephen had acted with the cooperation of the imperial legate in Rome.¹⁵⁸ Charles was surely still preoccupied with the stalled plan to legitimate Bernard (who, as noted above, remained in the prayer clauses of imperial charters in 886 and early 887) and had doubtless hoped to influence the election to ensure that the new pontiff was

¹⁵⁷ AFC s.a.885, p.103; Davis, *Lives*, pp.297, n.3, 298, n.8.

¹⁵⁸ AFC s.a.885, pp.103-4; *Liber Pontificalis*, c.112, pp.191-2. Reuter, *Annals*, p.99, n.11 and Davis, *Lives*, p.299, n.9 for commentary.

sympathetic to its resuscitation.¹⁵⁹ With Stephen's accession a *fait accompli* by the end of 885, the emperor had no choice but to travel to Italy at the start of 886 and negotiate with him directly. The specific outcome of the talks during Charles's five or six month stay south of the Alps is not known beyond the fact that he extracted papal permission to translate bishops from devastated sees. However, our source for this information, the Bavarian annalist, cryptically adds that 'ibi multimodis rebus, prout conplacuit [i.e. Charles], dispositis.'¹⁶⁰ With the succession situation the way it was, and given the events of the preceding few months, it is very likely that the Bernard plan was on the agenda.

Whatever general approval for the scheme may have been voiced by Stephen V in early 886, Charles's attention for the second half of that year was fully occupied by the siege of Paris, denying any opportunity to convene an assembly north of the Alps which the pope might attend. The next developments did not take place until the first few months of 887, when Charles decided to adopt Louis of Provence ('the Blind'), the son of Boso.

Our main source for this event is the Bavarian continuator's comment in his annal for 887, immediately after reporting Boso's death: 'obviam [Hludovicum] imperator ad Hrenum villa Chirihheim veniens honorifice ad hominem sibi quasi adoptivum filium eum iniunxit.'¹⁶¹ This report is still often taken to mean that Charles adopted Louis with the intention of making him heir to the whole empire. The most developed statement of this view was made by Hlawitschka in his 1968 book on Lotharingia, subsequently criticised by Penndorf and Löwe, then defended and elaborated by Hlawitschka in an article in 1978, since when it has been more or less accepted by historians.¹⁶² A brief overview of the arguments and evidence is therefore necessary here to show that Hlawitschka's case remains fatally flawed.

¹⁵⁹ The prayer clause evidence discussed in c.6.2 shows Charles's continuing support for Bernard's claims.

¹⁶⁰ BC s.a.886, p.114.

¹⁶¹ BC s.a.887, p.115.

¹⁶² Respectively Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, pp.32-8; Penndorf, *Problem*, pp.133-4; Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.144; Hlawitschka, 'Nachfolgeprojekt'. Hlawitschka's arguments as represented in what follows can be found in these places; references will be given for direct quotes. It will be evident that my argument differs from those of Penndorf and Löwe.

The fact that Louis was adopted by Charles in some sense is not disputed: adoption was a well-established political ritual in several early medieval kingdoms. What is at stake is the significance which Hlawitschka reads into this fact. He supports his central assertion, that inheritance 'was the logical consequence of adoption', by reference to other adoptions, from the Roman, Merovingian, Byzantine, Carolingian and central medieval periods.¹⁶³ However, apart from the chronological and geographical remoteness of many of these examples, which draw their relevance into question, almost all of them can in fact be used to prove the contrary case: while adoption was sometimes associated with inheritance, when it was it had to be spelled out explicitly. Spiritual kinship ties were conceived of quite loosely before the twelfth century, and did not have identical status to biological ties: the two bonds were complementary, not equivalent.¹⁶⁴ More often, spiritual adoption established a patron-client relationship than a father-son one.¹⁶⁵ A concrete contemporary example of this is given by the *Annales Fuldenses*'s report of an eternal peace made in 873 between the Saxons and Danes which was sponsored by Louis the German. The Danish legates asked 'ut rex dominos suos, supradictos scilicet reges, in loco filiorum habere dignaretur, et illi eum quasi patrem venerari vellent cunctis diebus vitae suae.'¹⁶⁶ The language of politics and peace thus frequently overlapped with the language of kinship. At least in part, therefore, the adoption of 887 must be seen in these terms, as symbolising the reconciliation of the line of Lothar to the Carolingian fold after the aberration of the *tyrannus* Boso.¹⁶⁷

The second main source cited by Hlawitschka in support of the inheritance idea, the record of Louis's election to kingship in 890 as recorded in the Capitulary of Valence, can also support the counter-case that the adoption was really about reconciliation.¹⁶⁸ The relevant section reads: 'Praestantissimus Carolus imperator iam regiam concesserat dignitatem et Arnulphus, qui successor eius existit, per suum sceptrum perque suos sagacissimos legatos...fautor regni

¹⁶³ Hlawitschka, 'Nachfolgeprojekt', p.26.

¹⁶⁴ Lynch, *Godparents*, pp.179, 190-1.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.191; see also Fried, 'Boso', pp.194, n. 6 and 197-204.

¹⁶⁶ AF s.a.873, pp.78-9.

¹⁶⁷ Reuter, *Annals*, p.113, n.6.

¹⁶⁸ *Hludowicus Regis Arelatensis Electio*.

auctorque in omnibus esse comprobatur.’ Arnulf was Charles’s successor, and established himself as a supporter of the ‘dignitas’ which Charles’s act had ‘iam concesserat’. In other words, the conjunction made by the text between Arnulf’s and Charles’s support for Louis implies that they were of like kind, that one confirmed the other. Arnulf, of course, did not name Louis as his heir. Rather, he recognised his right to be considered royal, and granted him ‘auctoritatis licentia’; by implication, this was also what Charles did. Nowhere does the text of Valence say that Louis was considered as Charles’s heir. By contrast, his relationships to King Boso (‘excellentissimi Bosonis regis filius’) and to the middle Carolingian line (‘nepos quondam Ludovici gloriosissimi imperatoris’, ‘ex prosapia imperiali’) are both heavily stressed. In other words, Louis’s supporters conceived of what took place at Kirchen in 887 not as a royal designation, but rather as a readmission to the royal family, a recognition that he shared in the charisma of the Carolingians.

We also have a post-Kirchen charter issued by Charles for Louis’s mother Irmingarde, Louis himself and his sisters. This document, which survives in the original from August 887, records a request made by Irmingarde to Charles to confirm in charter form what he had granted them at Kirchen; this turns out to be a general confirmation of Louis II’s holdings and grants to his family, and no mention at all is made of the adoption.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, while Irmingarde’s daughters are referred to in the penalty clause as ‘filiae dilectissimae nostrae’ (i.e. of Charles), a not unusual recasting of family ties in the spiritual-Christian language of Carolingian political dialogue,¹⁷⁰ Louis is named only twice, both times as ‘filius suus [ie. Hermingardim], nepos scilicet noster.’¹⁷¹ This charter, together with another issued for the Empress Engelberga on the same day, read like a *magna carta* of general confirmations for the family of Louis II; although Charles had issued confirmations for Louis II’s family before, these ones are marked out by the naming of Louis’ granchildren, and by the fine in the penalty clause of

¹⁶⁹ D CIII 165; Hlawitschka, ‘Nachfolgeprojekt’, pp.38-9.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. references to Engelberga as Charles’s ‘soror’; DD CIII 22, 56, 156, 166.

¹⁷¹ D CIII 165. Note also that the text itself was probably composed by a scribe of Irmingarde’s, which makes it doubly significant that the adoption is not mentioned.

Engelberga's charter, which was double any previous threatened amount.¹⁷² They thus fit in well with the view that the reception at Kirchen was primarily intended to make a definitive peace with the Lotharingian branch of the family after the death of Boso, backed by general confirmations of the rights and properties which had accrued to all its surviving members.

It should be noted that the confirmations apply to whatever Louis II passed on to his family 'hereditario iure': again, the context of the Lotharingian descent of Louis is paramount. The same appeal to Lotharingian heredity is made by the *Visio Karoli*, a vision text purportedly narrated by Charles the Fat himself. Despite the various theories in existence about the dating of this text, Hlawitschka's arguments for associating it with the election of 890 are, to my mind, by far the most convincing.¹⁷³ The text, composed at Rheims, was presumably designed to enhance Louis's royal claims by emphasising his place in a Lotharingian dynastic continuity, and to tempt him into a northwards expansion into the kingdom of Odo, with whom Archbishop Fulk was at loggerheads. As such it is a work of propaganda produced in the specific circumstances of Rheims in 890 and cannot, as Hlawitschka also claims, be used to prove that Louis's adoption in 887 (which it does not even allude to) was intended by Charles to be an imperial designation.¹⁷⁴

All things considered, therefore, the evidence all points towards the conclusion that the adoption was intended as a ritual of peacemaking between Charles and the Lotharingian Carolingian line whose last male representative Louis was. The fact that the Bavarian annalist reports the adoption of Louis in association with his reference to the death of Boso (11 January 887) strongly suggests that it was this event which inspired Charles to make peace with Louis. Moreover, the idea that the plans for the reconciliation were conceived when the news of Boso's death reached court in January would also explain why the

¹⁷² D CIII 166.

¹⁷³ Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, pp.98-106. Space does not permit discussion of the different cases.

¹⁷⁴ On this text, see also c.8. Note also that an entry in the Reichenau memorial book, made in the second half of the century, is headed by Lothar I, whose name is written in large red letters, with Engelberga, Irmingarde and Louis below. The list has a very dynastic feel and may well have been entered as part of the ceremonial surrounding the adoption at Kirchen. See Geuenich, 'Zurzach', p.42 with n.95.

Empress Engelberga was in Alemannia in February of that year.¹⁷⁵ Her presence at court should be seen as part of the preparatory negotiations for the imperial adoption of her grandson and the restoration to favour of the whole Lotharingian branch of the Carolingian family.¹⁷⁶

Another piece of evidence also has a bearing on the state of the succession issue in the first half of 887. A letter sent by Stephen V to Charles the Fat reveals that the emperor had requested the pope's presence at an assembly in Alemannia on 30 April 887, a request which Stephen now turned down.¹⁷⁷ Hlawitschka reckoned that Stephen had been summoned to oversee the adoption of Louis by Charles.¹⁷⁸ However, the fact that the April assembly was held at Waiblingen, while Louis was received at Kirchen no earlier than the end of May, renders this claim highly improbable.¹⁷⁹ Almost certainly, Stephen had been asked to come and legitimise Bernard to permit his designation as heir, perhaps something to which he had been willing to agree in principle during his negotiations with Charles in early 886.

This aborted meeting helps us put the adoption of Louis into perspective. Both assemblies were long-planned: Louis's, as argued above, had been in the offing since January, while the pope stated he had received the emperor's invitation on 30 March, which was just about as early in the year as was possible after the Alpine passes had cleared. The reception of Louis cannot therefore simply have been a reaction to the failure of Stephen to appear at Waiblingen: he was not made heir in Bernard's place. What part, then, might the adoption have been intended to play in the resolution of the succession crisis? There are two ways in which the reception could have helped Charles. Firstly, it ought to be stressed that Louis's formidable mother and grandmother, both political heavyweights in the Carolingian middle kingdom, were closely involved in the negotiations leading up to the Kirchen assembly. Peace and reconciliation with Louis was actually a sign of reconciliation with, and a revival of, the whole Lotharingian

¹⁷⁵ D CIII 156, issued at Rottweil. D C2 78 shows that she had been reconciled with the Carolingian kings, her erstwhile captors, by August 884 at the latest.

¹⁷⁶ Boso's death probably also motivated Charles to involve Geilo of Langres in these proceedings as his go-between with the Provençal bishops: see above, c.5.3.3.

¹⁷⁷ *Fragmenta*, no.14.

¹⁷⁸ Hlawitschka, 'Nachfolgeprojekt', p.25; Tellenbach, 'Grundlagen', p.296.

branch of the Carolingian dynasty. Their cooperation was desirable if, as argued earlier, Charles's plan was to install Bernard as subking in Lotharingia.¹⁸⁰ Secondly, even if the emperor did not regard Louis as an immediate heir in June 887, or consider granting him a subkingdom, making peace with him at least provided the safety net of another potential successor.¹⁸¹ Louis was still a minor (born c.880) but Charles was in no position to worry about hedging his bets.

The highly significant political nature of these assemblies at Waiblingen and Kirchen accounts for the attendance of imperial aristocrats like Berengar of Friuli, Odo of Paris and Geilo of Langres. Their consent, and that of their peers, would be required to guarantee the designation of Bernard and the recognition of Louis.¹⁸² We do not need to resort, as have some historians, to the hindsight-loaded view that their presence was part of an imperial plan to designate the *reguli* as heirs in May-June 887.¹⁸³ Hincmar's *De Ordine Palatii* gives a firm context for the appearance of such magnates at royal courts and assemblies to discuss, among other things, royal policy for the forthcoming year.¹⁸⁴ One other clear reason for the presence of Odo in particular was surely to accompany Bishop Askericus of Paris to collect the ransom which had been promised to the Seine Vikings as the price for lifting the siege of Paris in the previous year.¹⁸⁵ That Viking matters were on the agenda of these assemblies is also suggested by the privileges issued at the same time to delegations from Tournus and Soissons, both of which provided for their defence in case of attack.¹⁸⁶ The fact that these men were prepared to travel such a long way from west Francia to imperial assemblies in the east is another sign that the emperor's favour was still seen as important, and that the Carolingian system was still working.

¹⁷⁹ BC s.a. 887, p.115 for the Waiblingen assembly.

¹⁸⁰ See above, c.6.2.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Poupardin, *Provence*, p.147.

¹⁸² BC s.a.887, p.115 for Berengar at Waiblingen; DD CIII 160-2 for Odo and Geilo at Kirchen.

¹⁸³ Keller, 'Sturz', pp.379-84; Fried, *Weg*, pp.428-9; more tentatively Reuter, *Germany*, p.119.

¹⁸⁴ Hincmar, *De Ordine Palatii*, c.30, pp.84-6.

¹⁸⁵ AV s.a.887, pp.63-4. Since Odo had already received a general confirmation of the privileges and properties of his abbey of St-Martin in Tours (D CIII 139), the comparatively minor charters he received in 887 (DD 160-1) were unlikely to have been the main reason for his journey to east Francia; they should be seen as by-products of his attendance at court.

¹⁸⁶ DD CIII 162-3.

However, whatever the exact role envisaged for Louis by Charles, it was aired in the wake of yet another failure on the Bernard front. Stephen V's letter to the emperor is largely a list of vague and unconvincing apologies excusing him from attendance at Waiblingen, including the vileness of one of the legates and a lack of time to get ready. He professed confusion over exactly what he was being asked to do, yet his reference to Charles's 'necessitas' suggests that he was well aware of the general purpose of his projected journey. His confusion may reflect the vagueness and naïvety of Charles's request, and of the overall conception of the Bernard plan: exactly what did he expect the pope to do? In all probability, we must assume that he wanted approval for a dissolution of his barren marriage which would leave him free to wed Bernard's mother. There was, however, no specific ceremony which could be performed on Bernard himself to decisively remove the stain on his legitimacy with which he had been born. Whereas the issue at stake in the case of Lothar II had whether or not his first marriage (and the legitimacy of Hugh, his son by it) should be canonically recognised, Bernard had incontestably been born to a concubine outside marriage. Loose ends would inevitably remain, and Stephen's mind cannot but have been drawn to reflect on the political mess caused by the divorce politics of the 860s, a repeat performance of which he was presumably keen to avoid being sucked into. Another consideration was an unwillingness to turn his back on the fluid factional politics of the late ninth-century Vatican.¹⁸⁷ Whatever the exact line of the pope's reasoning, from Charles's point of view this was another serious political setback and threat to his credibility. Bernard remained illegitimate and unapproved, Arnulf remained out in the cold, and Charles remained unable to resolve the pressing problem of the succession. With doors slamming in his face at every turn, Charles decided to try a new angle. As we shall see, however, even with his options diminishing, he was still determined to keep his increasingly frustrated nephew out of the picture.

¹⁸⁷ For references to the often-deadly factional fighting in Rome, see AFC s.a.882, p.99; BC s.a.883, p.109; Reuter, *Annals*, p.94, n.17 provides commentary.

6.6: Liutward of Vercelli, the Empress Richgard and the governance of the empire

6.6.1: The royal divorce

The failure of the second attempt to get Bernard legitimised was a severe setback for Charles. Although Louis of Provence was now back in the circle of potential heirs and Boson was out of the way, Arnulf was recovering his balance after the humiliation of 885-6 and, as we have seen, it was becoming increasingly worrying to people like Notker that the succession issue was still not settled. To lose one pope from the support of his plans may have been unlucky, but two looked careless; Stephen V's thinly veiled rebuttal of Charles's request to come to Waiblingen to legitimise Bernard showed that this possible solution was a dead end for the foreseeable future. A new approach was most assuredly called for.

This brings us to Charles's divorce of Richgard and the expulsion from court of the archchancellor Liutward in summer 887. Our only narrative source for this story is Regino's *Chronicon*, and his description of the emperor's actions are here worth repeating in full: 'Et primo quidem Liudwardum episcopum Vercellensem, virum sibi percarum et in administrandis publicis utilitatibus unicum consiliarium, obiecto adulterii crimine, eo quod reginae secretis familiaris, quam oportebat, inmisceretur, a suo latere cum dedecore repulit. Deinde paucis interpositis diebus coniugem Richgardem- sic enim augusta vocabatur- pro eadem re in contionem vocat et, mirum dictu, publice protestatur numquam se carnali coitu cum ea miscuisse, cum plus quam decennio legitimi matrimonii foedere eius consortio esset sociata. Illa econtra non solum ab eius, sed etiam ab omni virili commixtione se immunem esse profitetur ac de virginitatis integritate gloriatur, idque se approbare Dei omnipotentis iudicio, si marito placeret, aut singulari certamine aut ignitorum vomerum examine, fiducialiter adfirmat; erat religiosa femina. Facto discidio in monasterio, quod in proprietate sua construxerat, Deo famulatura recessit.'¹⁸⁸

Historians have by and large been happy to accept Regino's allegation of adultery at face value, reading it as yet another case in the catalogue of disasters which are presumed to pepper Charles's reign revealing his loss of control over

¹⁸⁸ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.127.

events.¹⁸⁹ However, there is one glaring discrepancy in Regino's account. If Richgard was a virgin, which is presented as the grounds for divorce, how could Liutward have been guilty of adultery with her, the reason given for his expulsion from court? At least one of these two elements in the story must be false. Hlawitschka noticed this and concluded that Regino invented the story of the imperial couple's chastity in order to highlight Charles as a perfect model of Christian virtue, taking his material from the episode in 873 when the king had reportedly tried to renounce the trappings of the world, including intercourse with his wife.¹⁹⁰ But Regino did not necessarily intend to portray Charles as a paragon of virtue; the point of his version of the pious and stoical emperor's deposition was more a lesson about how even the most conspicuous worldly success was reliant on God-given *fortuna* and could be suddenly snatched away by the shortcomings of human frailty.¹⁹¹ Moreover, and in keeping with this viewpoint, the abbot of Prüm was not beyond criticising Charles's actions as unworthy, as in his negative judgement of the outcome of the siege of Paris, and in his accusation that Boso had been wrongly persecuted by all the Carolingians, who thus showed themselves to be perjurers.¹⁹²

A more obvious element in Regino's story is his use of precise canonical language to describe the divorce; the phrase 'facto discidio', for instance, is also used in the same author's famous compilation of canon law, the *De Synodalibus Causis*.¹⁹³ One would further note the judicial term 'contio' used to describe the hearing, the mutual declarations of innocence and the ordeal used as proof.¹⁹⁴ The apparent reference to Charles's outburst of 873 (implied by the mentioning of a ten year period of marriage) can be read as a device used by Regino to emphasise the validity of the grounds for divorce by referring back to another well-known point in the emperor's life when he had openly announced a desire to withdraw

¹⁸⁹ Eg. Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.142; Stafford, *Queens*, p.95.

¹⁹⁰ Hlawitschka, 'Nachfolgeprojekt', pp.44-6. The 873 reference comes from the claim that the marriage had lasted 'for more than ten years', which would be an odd thing to say in 887 when the couple had been married in 862.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Körtum, 'Weltgeschichte'.

¹⁹² Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.127; 879, p.114 respectively. On Regino and Boso see Staab, 'Jugement'.

¹⁹³ Regino, *De synodalibus causis*, book II, cc.244-5, p. 309; cf. c.243, pp.308-9.

¹⁹⁴ Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', pp.142-3; Bühner-Thierry, 'Reine', pp.307-9.

from the world.¹⁹⁵ All this suggests that whether or not Richgard was actually a virgin, this was the claim made publicly by the emperor in order to ensure that the divorce, or more properly annulment, could proceed canonically without descending into the legal and political shambles experienced in the 860s by the similarly-intentioned Lothar II.¹⁹⁶

This interpretation is supported by the evidence of the *Vita Verenae*, a short hagiographical text surviving in manuscripts from Reichenau, St-Gall and Einsiedeln and thought to have been written by Hatto, archbishop of Mainz and abbot of Reichenau, for Richgard following her retirement to Andlau.¹⁹⁷ Although the dedicatee and recipient of the *Vita* is not named, she is said to be of high nobility and to have taken a vow of chastity. This, together with the late-ninth century southern German context of the manuscripts and the connection of the cult with Richgard's abbey of Zuzach, has convinced historians that the empress was the work's recipient.¹⁹⁸ With this in mind, it is significant that the *Vita* is expressly intended as an *exemplum* for a virginal life, and that its subject may well have been married, perhaps chastely, before retiring to fulfil her monastic vocation.¹⁹⁹ We know that Hatto was a member of Charles the Fat's entourage while he himself was a mere monk at Reichenau.²⁰⁰ It is therefore not entirely out of the question that the emperor commissioned him to write the *Vita* on the occasion of his wife's retreat in 887, rather than, as is usually supposed, Hatto composing it spontaneously sometime after 888.²⁰¹ This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the monastery of Zuzach was intended to be removed from Richgard's control once her husband died so that it could be transferred to whichever church he was buried in.²⁰² Her links with the cult of

¹⁹⁵ See above, c.1.2.

¹⁹⁶ Stories circulated at the time of Charles's death relating his holiness and ascent to heaven, as shown by the reports of Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.888, pp.128-9; AV s.a.887, p.64; BC s.a.887, p.116. These could point to a contemporary belief that the marriage had been chaste.

¹⁹⁷ See Reinle, *Verena*, pp.26-31 for the text.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, pp.21-2; Geuenich, 'Zuzach', pp.38-9; Klüppel, *Hagiographie*, pp.60-4.

¹⁹⁹ Reinle, *Verena*, c.2, p.26 (*exemplum*), c.5, p.27 (reference to a marriage); cf. Reinle's comments at p.36.

²⁰⁰ *Liber Memorialis Romaricensis*, fol. 9r.

²⁰¹ It is suggestive, though no more than suggestive, that the divorce was carried out in June 887, shortly before Verena's feast day on September 1, which would have provided a suitable occasion for a presentation of the *Vita*.

²⁰² D CIII 43.

Verena would thus have been severed after January 888, a fact which argues for an early date for the *Vita* and hence the involvement of Charles in the propagation of the story that his marriage had been chaste.

Was Richgard really a virgin? Although we cannot know, this seems unlikely. Charles, with a son to prove it, was not, and his anxious and repeated attempts to solve his succession problems throughout the 880s make it improbable that he would have tolerated a chaste marriage for over 25 years. Bernard was apparently still a minor when Notker wrote the *Gesta Karoli* in the mid 880s, and so is likely to have been born *after* 873, the year when Charles claimed a desire to renounce sexual intercourse.²⁰³ Notker, moreover, expressed the belief in 881, and again in 885-6, that there was yet a chance of Richgard and Charles conceiving.²⁰⁴

If the divorce was not therefore the result of a genuine inclination for renunciation on the part of the royal couple, it was probably political. Why would Charles have wanted to orchestrate the expulsion of his wife?²⁰⁵ Clearly, exactly because they had failed to produce children together, and canonical separation on the grounds of chastity cleared the way for a new marriage. Why now and not before? Because previous succession plans, namely the Vienne deal made in 880 and the two attempts to legitimise Bernard, had proved fruitless, and so a new tactic was necessary. After the failure of his partnerships with Hadrian III and Stephen V, Charles decided (or was forced by circumstances) to abandon papal sponsorship as the legitimating device for his plans, and to replace it with a public ordeal.

Another change of tack is also identifiable: it is unlikely that the plan this time round was for Charles to legitimise Bernard by marrying his mother, who, given that we have no information about her, seems not to have been of noble stock. For the likes of Notker, who in his *Continuatio* made a point of approvingly stressing the nobility of the mothers of Arnulf and Louis the Younger's illegitimate son Hugh, while neglecting to mention Bernard at all, this

²⁰³ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.12, p.74; 2.14, p.78 describes him in diminutive terms.

²⁰⁴ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330; Notker, *Gesta*, 2.14, p.78.

may have been seen as a barrier to this solution.²⁰⁶ As well as this, the problem of Bernard's illegitimate birth was thornier even than that of Lothar II's son Hugh in the disputes of the 860s. Whereas Lothar had been able to argue that Hugh had been born within wedlock, Bernard's birth was incontrovertibly extra-marital. This meant that his legitimacy would always remain contestable. While Charles may have believed that papal endorsement would be enough to counteract this argument, he appears not to have been confident that he could succeed on his own authority. It is surely no coincidence that Bernard was not included in imperial charter prayer clauses in late 887 as he had been in 885, and indeed was programmatically left out on at least one occasion.²⁰⁷

There must have been plenty of promising noble candidates for the position of queen, well capable of bearing 'aliquem parvulum Ludowiculum vel Carolastrum' to the emperor.²⁰⁸ Either way, the divorce and remarriage scheme was yet another clear sign that Arnulf of Carinthia was to have no part in the succession plans of Charles the Fat. Since 885 Arnulf had been the second most senior Carolingian, both in closeness to the main bloodline (outranking Bernard in age) and in practical support. The second failure of the Bernard plan in early 887 made him the only realistic successor. The fact that the divorce of Charles was actually carried through must, I suggest, have convinced Arnulf that the door was closing on him forever unless he acted swiftly. It made obvious to him the emperor's intransigence on the identity of his heir, and alerted him to the fact that the remarriage which was surely imminent would strengthen Charles and weaken his own position still further. Bernard no longer posed Arnulf a threat: but in the divorce, finally, was a succession scheme which had the potential to succeed. This was the decisive factor which set in motion the chain of events which culminated in Charles's deposition in November.

²⁰⁵ It is worth stressing that Richgard seems to have been a willing participant in her own fate. Keller, 'Sturz', p.354 n.63 presumes that her expulsion led her relatives to join Arnulf's coup in outrage; I know of no evidence to support this assertion.

²⁰⁶ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330. Assuming he was of age in 890-1, when he led revolts against Arnulf, Bernard must have been born before Notker wrote this text, in 881.

²⁰⁷ D CIII 168 from September 887, in which there is no mention of *proles*, although the textual model, which the charter otherwise followed faithfully, did include such a reference. See Ewig, 'Gebetsdienst', p.75.

²⁰⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.11, p.68.

This hypothesis leaves certain loose ends to be tidied up. What, for instance, can be said of the role of Liutward of Vercelli in all this? If he had actually committed adultery, which would be inconsistent with Charles's claim that Richgard was a virgin, it is very striking that this was not mentioned by the Mainz annalist in his litany of Biblically-inspired accusations against the archchancellor in his annal for 887. The language of sexual impropriety was particularly well suited to this author's purpose and he had a ready-made parallel available to him in the book of Esther, which he utilised extensively to compose this annal.²⁰⁹ His silence is therefore deafening.

If, then, Liutward was not really an adulterer, why was he expelled from court? A charter of late 887 refers back to the dispossession of the archchancellor, relating that it had taken place 'quibusdam exortis occasionibus'.²¹⁰ This vague clue is probably to be placed in the context of factionalism surrounding the succession issue. That factions had formed around this point is clear. As we have seen, Charles had tried to remove 'quidam episcopi' from office after objections had been made to the 885 plan to legitimise Bernard.²¹¹ Two years later in 887 the continuators of the *Annales Fuldenses* attributed Liutward's ejection to Charles's discussions with 'his men' and 'the Alemans'.²¹² Both these latter reports imply friction between parties at the court itself, although, since almost all of the men in Charles's entourage were Alemans (including Liutward and Liutbert), we can say little more about their makeup.²¹³ Most historians see the turning point of this dispute as being concerned with the adoption of Louis of Provence and a consequent argument over the principle of imperial unity, but, as argued earlier, this explanation is methodologically unsatisfactory.²¹⁴ Moreover, the plan to adopt Louis was conceived by Charles upon hearing of the death of Boso in January 887, and was certainly well underway by the time the Empress

²⁰⁹ Bührer-Thierry, 'Conseiller', p.122. I therefore reject Bührer-Thierry's argument that the adultery did take place but was somehow too sensitive to mention.

²¹⁰ D CIII 170.

²¹¹ AFC s.a.885, p.103. It may be more than chance that this event coincided with the withdrawal of Salomon, future bishop of Constance and abbot of St-Gall, from the imperial court. Cf. Zeller, *Salomo*, pp.42-3.

²¹² AFC s.a.887, p.105; BC s.a.887, p.115.

²¹³ Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, pp.189-98.

²¹⁴ See c.6.1.

Engelberga made representations at the court in February.²¹⁵ If Liutward opposed the plan, it is inexplicable that he should have remained in favour until at least the end of May that year, and indeed possibly until after the adoption was effected.²¹⁶

If the connection between the adoption and the fall of the archchancellor is severed, and actual adultery is ruled out, then the relatively overlooked fact, recorded by Regino, that Liutward was deposed in connection with the beginning of the divorce proceedings takes on much greater significance. The particular functions of the queen within the Carolingian court made her a potential crystallising point for the formation of factions and her arrival or departure could easily lead to the rise and fall of groups of prominent royal advisers; certainly, the crises of Louis the Pious's reign had come to a head in large part over factional politics surrounding his second wife Judith.²¹⁷ I would suggest that the fall of Liutward is most likely, in the circumstances outlined above, to have been due to his close association with the empress at the court of Charles the Fat. If it can be shown that his position was intimately linked to hers, then we can understand why he might have tried to oppose the divorce-succession plan and ended up out on his ear. The rest of chapter 6.6 is an attempt to substantiate this assertion.

Before that, however, some discrepancies remain. Firstly, we have to explain why Regino accused Liutward and Richgard of illicit extra-marital activities if, as argued, the establishment of the empress's virginity was the real issue at stake in the divorce. A possible answer lies in the fact that, certainly by the late ninth century, the rhetoric of sexual impropriety was firmly established as an effective weapon of political attack. The close relationship between a queen and an adviser was liable to be transformed by accusation or rumour into a case of

²¹⁵ See c.6.5.

²¹⁶ BC s.a.887, p.115 shows him still in favour in May. The last charter he subscribed as archchancellor was D CIII 159, dated 30 May, while Liutbert's first appearance was in D 160, dated 16 June. Both of these were enacted at Kirchen, which is also where Louis was adopted. However, we do not know the exact date on which this took place; it is entirely possible that it was done while Liutward was still in place and, given his preeminence at court, the ceremony could well have been orchestrated by him. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the feast of Ascension, which offered a striking parallel of the reception of a son to emphasise the significance of the adoption, fell on May 25. For this suggestion and others about the sacred significance of dates in May 887 for this assembly, and about Charles the Fat's penchant for associating the feast of Ascension with important political statements, see Sierck, *Festtag*, pp.95, 103, 157.

²¹⁷ Bührer-Thierry, 'Reine', pp.299-301, 311-2 offers apposite general comments. See also Ward, 'Agobard'; eadem, 'Caesar's Wife'.

adultery. This is especially so for Regino, writing two decades after the event from the perspective of an outsider and as someone with little regard for the bishop of Vercelli, whom he depicted as an archetypal despiser of Christ's command.²¹⁸ Elsewhere Regino lamented that the fall of the Carolingians was down to the 'sterilitas coniugum', a statement which hints that, despite his allegations about Liutward, he knew what had really been at stake in the events of 887.²¹⁹

Secondly, the question arises of why the two continuations of the *Annales Fuldenses* fail to mention the divorce at all. For the Mainz annalist this is not hard to explain. His polemical and calculated deployment of facts to create an image of bad kingship (or, as in the 887 annal, bad archchancellorship) necessitated, as we saw most clearly in his account of the siege of Asselt, a tendency to pass over actual circumstances in silence if they did not fit his purpose. In 887 this author, now with a favourable attitude towards the emperor, chose to ignore various events connected to the succession (such as the death of Boso, the adoption of Louis, the invitation to Pope Stephen and the divorce of Richgard) which, had he still been hostile to Charles, he might have used in an invective against court policy. The divorce, if adultery was not involved, had no real value as a weapon with which to criticise his main target, Liutward.²²⁰ The perspective of the Bavarian continuator had also shifted: from his previous position as a provincial chronicler generally favourable to Charles, in his 887 entry he wrote as an apologist for Arnulf, casting his rise in terms of a realm-wide aristocratic *conspiratio* against an inactive and mortally ill emperor.²²¹ If this change in attitude is explained, as seems likely, by the fact that the author wrote this account

²¹⁸ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.901, p.148; Sierck, *Festtag*, pp.240-1.

²¹⁹ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.880, p.117.

²²⁰ On the other hand, the general theme of this annal, Liutward's pride and consequent attempts to usurp royal rights, could include his opposition to the emperor's decision to divorce his wife. Moreover, the explicit parallel made by the annalist between Charles and King Ahasuerus from the book of Esther in his account of the year 887 may have served as a sidelong reference to the matter. Ahasuerus had, like Charles, decided to divorce his first wife, something which may have influenced the annalist's choice of biblical reference: the criticism of the archchancellor which was the text's primary purpose would (as Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', pp.114-5 points out) have been better served by the selection of Jeroboam from the book of Kings. Moreover, the Esther model was not chosen for its depiction of queenly adultery. However, the argument could be played either way, and it is probably wise not to push the significance of the parallel too far.

²²¹ Bowlus, 'Early History', p.557.

up retrospectively, after Charles's death in January 888, which he refers to in his 887 annal, then it was clearly not in keeping with his representation of events to include the emperor's divorce of Richgard. His Charles the Fat was inactive, ill and at the mercy of others, while his Arnulf was responding to a general call for his firm leadership, not to a new twist in the succession politics of the royal house. The idea, which would be implied by the mention of the divorce, that Arnulf had rebelled in response to a quite legitimate exclusion from power hardly cast him in a flattering light.

The case for a political motivation for the divorce of the royal couple connected to the succession, and the archchancellor's opposition to it for factional reasons, has so far been made largely by a process of elimination. The evidence does not allow us to accept that this was simply some scandal which was foisted from nowhere upon the startled emperor²²², nor that Liutward and Richgard were engaged in a sinister conspiracy against Charles.²²³ Likewise, ideological and sexual motivations can be ruled out. What remains is actually quite a clever move by the emperor to make a virtue out of a necessity. The declaration of the chastity of his marriage was designed not only to get him out of a barren union with the opportunity to find a new wife, but to sanctify the situation and eliminate grounds for opposition. Clearly, Charles and his advisers had absorbed the lessons to be learned from the problems of some of his predecessors, notably Lothar II. Unfortunately, the details of what actually went on in June 887 are obscure, despite the existence of several sources. The best way to add substance to the presumed close political relationship between Richgard and Liutward is hence to contextualise their respective positions in the governance of the empire.

6.6.2: The career of Liutward

A column in the memorial book of the monastery of Remiremont, very probably entered before 876 and possibly connected with Charles the Fat's journey to visit Charles the Bald in 872, shows that Liutward, at this time only a Reichenau monk, was in the future ruler's entourage before he was raised to

²²² Tellenbach, 'Grundlagen', p.248.

²²³ Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.142.

kingship.²²⁴ If 872 is indeed the correct date, this demonstrates Liutward's readiness to follow his lord even into rebellion against Louis the German. Moreover, it appears on palaeographical grounds that both this and a similar record left in the *liber memorialis* of Pfäfers in Rhaetia were actually written by Liutward himself, a further indication of his importance to Charles even at this early stage.²²⁵ This evidence also adds weight to Paul Kehr's suggestion that Charles had been developing a chancery and diplomatic style for some time before 876, accounting for the individualistic series of charters issued during his early years as king.²²⁶ After Charles had assumed full power in Alemannia, Liutward was involved in the chancery's development both as scribe and, from 878 at the latest, archchancellor.²²⁷ On the occasion of his Italian coronation at Ravenna in early 880, the king intervened in a local dispute between the churches of Rome and Milan to impose Liutward on the see of Vercelli.²²⁸ Sometime between then and November 882 he added the title of archchaplain to his list of dignities. Finally, at some point before 884 he also seems to have become abbot of Bobbio.²²⁹

There is no doubting, therefore, the fact that the rise to power of Charles was very much in tandem with that of his long-term associate Liutward. However, historians, in keeping with the view of Charles as a sickly and weak personality, have credited the bishop of Vercelli with having an overwhelming control of the politics of the reign at the king's expense; Borgolte's view that it was Liutward who really 'directed government' is not atypical.²³⁰ There are three main pieces of evidence which are taken to support this view. The first and second are the accounts of the Mainz annalist and of Regino of Prüm, both of

²²⁴ *Liber Memorialis Romaricensis*, fol.9r. The terming of Charles as *rex* rather than *imperator* rules out the date of 885 often ascribed to this entry.

²²⁵ *Libri Confraternitatum*, p.361; Tellenbach, 'Gedenkbücher', pp.396-9.

²²⁶ Kehr, *Kanzlei*, p.6.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7, noting also that the use of the term *archicancellarius* was hitherto unknown in the east; perhaps this denotes a more hierarchic organisation in Charles's chancery; pp.14-7 for the personal connections between Liutward and individual notaries such as Inquirinus, who was also present in the royal entourage at Remiremont.

²²⁸ Schmid, 'Liutbert', p.53.

²²⁹ Notker, *Liber Ymnorum*, p.8; von den Steinen, *Darstellungsband*, p.505.

²³⁰ Borgolte, 'Karl', p.21; cf. Keller, 'Sturz', p.338 on the bishop's 'ruling influence over the emperor'; Bund, *Thronsturz*, p.478 on him as 'the director of imperial policy'; Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft*, p.261 describing him as 'all-powerful'.

whom characterise Liutward in such terms. However, it has already been argued that both these authorities were hostile to the archchancellor for other reasons, and deployed the image of the unique counsellor as a polemical motif to discredit him as an obstacle to *consensus* and *consilium*.²³¹ Their opinions are therefore not to be accepted at face value. We have already encountered several other individuals who figured prominently among the close advisers of the emperor, men such as Odo of Paris, Geilo of Langres, Theoderic of Vermandois and the unnamed 'Alemans' consulted about the downfall of Liutward.²³² The roles of these men give the lie to the assertion that the latter enjoyed exclusive access to the throne. The Bavarian annalist probably comes closest to characterising his position accurately when he refers to Liutward as 'maximus consiliator regis palatii'; this is by no means an unusual or sinister way of defining the power of the archchancellor at any Carolingian court of the ninth century.²³³

The third piece of evidence for Liutward's alleged supremacy is the great number of times he is mentioned as intercessor in royal diplomas of Charles the Fat; according to Fleckenstein, these 'demonstrate that it was he who actually shared out governmental favour'.²³⁴ Certainly, Liutward was named as intervener considerably more often than any other individual, and it is valid to use this sort of evidence as an indication of who was 'in' and 'out' of favour at court.²³⁵ However, closer analysis of these documents casts some doubt on Fleckenstein's (and others') interpretation. Of the 34 known interventions for third parties which he made between February 880 and February 887 (our first and last examples), no fewer than 25 concerned Italian affairs. Of the rest, 4 were for the western

²³¹ AFC: above, c.2. Regino: above, c.6.6.1. On this rhetorical device see Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', pp.115-7, 119-21.

²³² Note that as well as Liutward, Odo and Hugh the Abbot are also granted the rare privilege of featuring in the prayer clauses of an imperial charter, a provision normally reserved for members of the royal family; DD CIII 92, 145, 160. All three are, strictly speaking, confirmations of prayer provisions originally made by the charters' recipients.

²³³ BC s.a.887, p.115. Cf. Hincmar, *De Ordine Palatii*, c.12, p.54 on Adalhard as 'inter primos consiliarios priumum'; c.16, pp.62-4 on the co-supremacy of the archchancellor in the palace; c.30, p.84 on the small assembly held by the king 'cum senioribus tantum et praecipuis consiliariis'.

²³⁴ Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, p.191; also stressed by Keller, 'Sturz', pp.338-40.

²³⁵ For a literary depiction of intervention at court, see Notker, *Gesta*, 1.4, pp.5-6; Goetz, *Strukturen*, p.26.

kingdom, 3 for Lotharingia and only 2 for Alemannia.²³⁶ The well-known diversity of style in Charles the Fat's charters, due to the fact that many of them were drafted by scribes of the beneficiary, does not account for this bias in the figures, as the main formulas were standardised and supervised by an imperial notary and the archchancellor before being enacted.²³⁷ That this included the formulas for intercession, which became fairly standard from the reign of Charles onwards, is indicated by the fact that they appeared for the first time in different *regna* (with different chancery traditions) more or less simultaneously.²³⁸ The implication, therefore, is that Liutward's influence was limited primarily to Italy.²³⁹

Even here, however, his power was not omnipresent. The geographical spread of beneficiaries on whose behalf the bishop is known to have petitioned the emperor is essentially confined to the western half of Lombardy, stretching in a loop west from Brescia through Bergamo and Milan to Asti, and then back east as far as Reggio by way of Pavia and Piacenza.²⁴⁰ There are four exceptions to this observation. Three charters from June 883, which were intended to strengthen the relationship between the emperor and the churches of Casauria, Farfa and Fermo in and around the duchy of Spoleto, were issued at the request of Liutward.²⁴¹ These documents stand alone as diplomatic evidence for Charles's intervention in the affairs of the duchy, and presumably represent an opportunistic attempt to establish control while the *dux* Guy was out of royal favour in summer 883.²⁴²

²³⁶ Italy: DD CIII 18, 21, 23, 26-9, 33, 36, 39, 44-8, 78, 82-4, 87, 111, 114-5, 126, 156. West: DD 123, 129, 151, 153. Lotharingia: DD 94, 104, 121. Alemannia: DD 38, 99. DD 54 (for the church of Vercelli) and 92 (for Liutward and Reichenau) are disqualified as the bishop was also a recipient. Bührer-Thierry, 'Évêques', p.35 somehow reaches figures of 25-1-3-5 respectively.

²³⁷ Kehr, *Kanzlei*, pp.36-7, 43, 49.

²³⁸ D CIII 18 of February 880 for the Italian priest Leo is the first true example, while DD 24 and 38 from July 880 and May 881 respectively, are early examples from Alsace and Alemannia.

²³⁹ Bührer-Thierry, 'Évêques', p.35.

²⁴⁰ See Map 6.

²⁴¹ DD CIII 82-4. Farfa was extended full imperial protection. The Fermo charter, D 84, is not a direct extension of royal protection, but it does represent an escalation of Charles's interests in the area by increasing the church's jurisdiction, granting it royal properties, and making provisions that gifts made for the benefit of Carolingian souls should be inalienable. For the prime importance of Casauria for Carolingian influence in this region, see Feller, 'Aristocratie', pp.326-8, 342-3.

²⁴² AFC s.a.883, p.100; BC s.a.883, pp.109-10 states that Guy was accused of treason, presumably in absentia, at Nonantola, where these two charters were issued. Note that D CIII 83 mentions Guy, but tellingly without his title *dux*. D 81 reveals that Pope Marinus was present at Nonantola. Lechner, 'Verlorene Urkunden', no.539 for the church of Teramo in Spoleto probably also

The fourth exception is the intervention of Liutward in February 882 for the church of Belluno in Friuli. Here, the archchancellor was named only as the grant's co-petitioner, in the illustrious company of the *marchio* Berengar.²⁴³ It is striking that Liutward, despite his obvious influence in the west of Italy, was not involved in the distribution of royal favour in Friuli and eastern Lombardy on any other occasion.²⁴⁴ This suggests that from Verona eastwards the shots were being called by Berengar and his allies, whom we have already encountered as vigorous royal representatives in this important region, and explains why Liutward could not intercede alone in Belluno.²⁴⁵ Berengar and his associate Waltfred of Verona, conversely, were on at least one occasion involved in the securing of royal patronage for a west Lombard recipient while they were at court.²⁴⁶ We might add the prominent participation of these men in royal judicial hearings, something which cannot be said of Liutward.²⁴⁷ It is also worth remembering that even Liutward's involvement in the attempt to secure imperial influence in Spoleto could only be accomplished in the wake of an initially-successful military invasion led by Berengar.²⁴⁸ These observations are paralleled by the fact that of the nine times Liutward is known to have intervened for beneficiaries north of the Alps, four were in conjunction with other powerful figures from the relevant area, while two others make mention of associated, though less significant, petitions.²⁴⁹ From the intervention evidence, therefore, the archchancellor's influence over the distribution of imperial patronage appears to have been comparatively weak outside north-west Italy.

There is a further case to be made that Liutward's power differed from Berengar's qualitatively, and not just in its sphere of influence. Six men are given the title *consiliarius* in the charters of Charles the Fat, of whom Liutward is easily

belongs in 883. The other known lost Italian charters of Charles are all for recipients no further south or south-east than Florence.

²⁴³ D CIII 48.

²⁴⁴ DD CIII 37, 49, 76, 80, 110.

²⁴⁵ See c.4.3. For the importance of Verona to Berengar, see Rosenwein, 'Politics', pp.259-61.

²⁴⁶ D CIII 32, issued at Pavia for bishop Wibod and the church of Parma.

²⁴⁷ DD CIII 25 and 31, concerning rights and properties in Novalese, Sienna and Arezzo.

²⁴⁸ BC s.a.883, p.110.

²⁴⁹ D CIII 38 in Alemannia with Richgard; DD 94 and 104 in Lotharingia with Hugh of Lotharingia and Richgard; D123 in Lyon with the *marchio* Bernard Plantevelue. DD 99 and 153

the most frequently mentioned.²⁵⁰ The meaning of this word, which (in charters) is largely confined to Italian sources and at all times denoted a magnate or official of unusual proximity to the throne, is argued by Keller to have undergone a subtle transformation in Italy in the course of the ninth century. At first a simple auxiliary epithet to describe a magnate high in royal favour, under Louis II it came to refer more specifically to men in court positions who were sent out by the king to represent him in different roles in the localities while remaining outside the ranks of the entrenched local aristocracy. After 875, claims Keller, the bearers of the title were in fact these very aristocrats, men without whom kings could not do, and who had an unavoidably high share in royal government, a role institutionalised by the carrying of the name *consiliarius*.²⁵¹ Of the six *consilarii* of Charles the Fat, three, Wibod, Berengar and Walfred, seem to fit Keller's post-875 model most approximately. Wibod, bishop of Parma since before 860, was a major player in Italian politics under all the late Carolingian kings, acting for example as ambassador for both Louis II and the Empress Engelberga.²⁵² The landed power of the church under his control was monumental, comprising key properties throughout northern Italy, partly thanks to the heavy patronage he attracted from the Carolingians.²⁵³ Charles the Fat continued this patronage,²⁵⁴ referred to Wibod as his 'summus consiliarius',²⁵⁵ and brought him along to attend his west Frankish coronation in 885.²⁵⁶ Berengar and Walfred also fit the Keller scheme, as the evidence discussed in chapter 4.3 implies. Their position as long-established magnates in the eastern half of Lombardy meant that they too had a pre-existing practical authority which was recognised and institutionalised by Charles the Fat, manifest in his conferment on them of titles like *consiliarius* and *marchio*. The circumstances of men like these meant that they had to be

refer to approaches made by abbot Rothoh of Reichenau and Geilo of Langres respectively. Of Liutward's 25 Italian intercessions, only four were co-petitioned.

²⁵⁰ DD CIII 21, 23, 29, 33, 36, 47, 78, 111, 114, 115, 126 (Liutward); D 16 (Walfred of Verona and Berthold, count of the palace); D 32 (Berengar of Friuli and Walfred of Verona); D 47 (Wibod of Parma); D 86 (Otulf).

²⁵¹ Keller, 'Struktur'. Kasten, *Königssöhne*, pp.410-5 is a recent supporter of Keller's arguments.

²⁵² AB s.a.870, p.175, 872, p.188.

²⁵³ See Keller, 'Struktur', p.221; Benassi, *Codice*, nos.25 and 25bis.

²⁵⁴ DD CIII 15, 32, 33, 36, 115, 126, 171.

²⁵⁵ D CIII 47, when he intervened for the church of Reggio along with Liutward.

²⁵⁶ D CIII 126 was issued at Etrepv in June 885.

considered in the running of the Italian kingdom; but Charles the Fat, like every other king of the early middle ages (and not just those after 875), ruled through such people, not in spite of them.

The same was not true, however, for the other three *consilarii*. Liutward was not from a family with deep roots in Italy; rather, as we have seen, he was an Aleman who had been parachuted (so to speak) into the see of Vercelli by the new king in 880. His position was achieved thanks to a longstanding personal association with Charles the Fat. He was not a major beneficiary of royal largess. The gift of a decent array of *curtes* to the church of Vercelli in March 882 looks like an attempt to create a more solid base for the bishopric out of imperial properties in the area.²⁵⁷ Even so, it was nothing compared to the far-reaching properties under the control of the likes of Wibod and Berengar.²⁵⁸ The archchancellor's lack of deep roots in Lombardy is well illustrated by his *discordia* with Berengar, in which the former was accused of forcibly removing the *marchio*'s niece from a nunnery in Brescia in order to marry her off to a member of his family, and suffered a retaliatory raid on his own *civitas* for his trouble.²⁵⁹ This looks like a clear case of the parvenu seeking to establish his kin by engineering a marriage into a local family with a more prestigious pedigree which, in this case, contained a strain of imperial blood.²⁶⁰ Berengar was held to be the aggressor by the emperor, lending some weight to Schmid's suggestion that Charles and Engelberga, the convent's proprietor, may actually have consented to Liutward's actions.²⁶¹ Ultimately, however, the *marchio*'s opposition to the union seems to have prevailed, backed by his undeniably significant military following. To advance his relatives step by step was thus a painstaking business for the archchancellor, who had to rely on *Königsnähe* rather than any great political presence in Italy.²⁶² He is always encountered in the sources at the emperor's side

²⁵⁷ D CIII 54. D OIII 323 mentions further gifts by Charles to the church, but may well be suspect; see Kehr's preface to D 54.

²⁵⁸ See also c.6.6.5.

²⁵⁹ AFC s.a.887, pp.105-6; BC s.a.886, p.114, 887, p.115.

²⁶⁰ See Schmid, 'Liutbert', pp.45-8 for discussion of the feud. Berengar was a descendant of Louis the Pious. It is worth noting that, as in 883, he was seemingly the main military power in northern Italy.

²⁶¹ BC s.a.887, p.115; Schmid, 'Liutbert', p.47.

²⁶² Other members of his family did find some success in this regard; his brother Chadolt became bishop of Novara in August 882 but he, as another of the Reichenau monks who had been in

or on imperial business. He travelled with the court, and did not depend on his position as bishop of Vercelli to further his career in any independent way.²⁶³ He certainly did not somehow rule Italy as regent when the king was north of the Alps. This almost constant attendance at the side of the emperor must help explain why Liutward is found intervening in charters so much more often than the likes of Berengar and Wibod, who were more liable to stay in their own centres of power; he was more often at court. To some extent, in other words, his great prominence in clauses of intercession has been misread by historians; it cannot be translated directly into a proportionately superior role in the actual governance of the realm.²⁶⁴

Liutward's position in Italy, therefore, seems to conform more to Keller's model of the role of the *consiliarius* during the reign of Louis II than to that which he proposes for the period after 875; a man without top-rank landed and local official credentials but with great influence based primarily on a prestigious court job and privileged access to the king, and used as a sort of general royal representative sent into the localities to undertake a variety of tasks. Hence we encounter him as a conspicuous mediator of royal patronage in western Lombardy, as an agent of the attempt to intervene in Spoleto, and also as an occasional ambassador of Charles at the papal curia.²⁶⁵ We might say that while a man like Wibod became a *consiliarius* because he was bishop of Parma, Liutward became bishop of Vercelli because he was a *consiliarius*. Similar conclusions apply to the other two Alemans entitled *consilarii* during the reign, whose power likewise relied on court positions; Berthold as count of the palace and Otulf as royal chaplain.²⁶⁶ Men like these tend to loom large in our sources as a result, and must be seen, especially in the case of Liutward, as particularly enjoying the confidence of the king. However, we should not let their prominence obscure the authority undeniably wielded by the bishops and *marchiones* who resided away from court. The two types of aristocrat identified by Keller thus coexisted in post-875 Italy,

Charles's entourage before 876, had access to *Königsnähe* independent of Liutward. For Chadolt's dates see Hlawitschka, 'Diptychen'. Another Liutward, probably a relative of the pair, was subsequently bishop of Como; Keller, 'Struktur', p.215.

²⁶³ Although episcopal rank may have been considered a prerequisite for the post of archchaplain.

²⁶⁴ See Bougard, 'Cour', pp.257-9 for similar criticisms of the Keller model.

²⁶⁵ For the latter, *Registrum*, no.263; AB s.a.882, p.249; AFC s.a.885, pp.103-4.

just as they always had done in Carolingian politics: it is tidy but overly schematic to postulate a simple 'rise' of the territorial aristocracy to eclipse those whose positions relied more on royal favour. Nevertheless, while *Königsnähe* could be a spectacular maker of men, as the archchancellor was eventually to find out it could also be dangerously ephemeral.

6.6.3: Richgard and Liutward

Some connections between the careers of the archchancellor and the empress are immediately apparent. For one thing, they were related.²⁶⁷ Although there is no direct evidence, it can thus be speculated that the rise of Richgard, married to Charles since 861/2, was linked to the early presence of Liutward and Chadolt in the future king's entourage. This would not be out of keeping with the pattern of the advancement of queens' relatives at various Carolingian courts; Bishop Witgar of Augsburg, for instance, a relative of Queen Emma, was a chaplain in Louis the German's palace in the late 850s before becoming the first archchaplain of Charles the Fat.²⁶⁸

Two types of source already mentioned imply further links between the two. Firstly, the letters of John VIII reveal that the pope, when particularly keen to exert influence over the emperor, would write exhortatory missives to both empress and archchancellor: significantly, Richgard only appears in John VIII's letters in association with Liutward.²⁶⁹ Secondly, the pair intervened together three times in Charles's charters.²⁷⁰ The significance of this is emphasised by the facts that they are the only major duo which appears more than once in the diplomas, and that the empress only interceded for third parties without Liutward on two occasions.²⁷¹ The geographical and institutional variety in these three grants, for the priest Ruodbert in Alemannia, the canons of St-John in Monza, and

²⁶⁶ Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, p.194; Keller, 'Struktur', p.217.

²⁶⁷ Bühner-Thierry, 'Évêques', p.36.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p.33. The classic example is Judith and the rise of the Welfs.

²⁶⁹ *Registrum*, nos.291, 309.

²⁷⁰ DD CIII 38, 46 and 104.

²⁷¹ DD CIII 109 (for the *Marienkappelle* at Aachen, with Liutbert of Mainz as co-petitioner) and 154 (for the royal *fidelis* Dodo and the church of Langres). DD 116 and 137 both mention as interveners Rudolf and his son Pippin, but they seem to be counted as a single 'unit', Pippin presumably being a minor.

the episcopal church of Liège, further highlights the unusual importance of the role that the two played together in mediating access to the royal throne while they resided at court.

It is not surprising to find a Carolingian empress and an archchancellor figuring prominently in the sources for the distribution of royal favour. That they are frequently found together (Richgard more often than not) in such a context is more suggestive. This implication of political closeness becomes more solid after a consideration of Charles the Fat's methods of rule in Alemannia and Alsace.

8.6.4: Alemannia: the emperor's kingdom

It will be clear from the foregoing discussion, as well as from previous chapters, that different parts of the sprawling empire were governed in different ways. The *marchiones* were members of the *Reichsaristokratie* entrenched in various localities, recognised by Charles and utilised as his representatives. Some, like Bernard and Berengar, were already in place when he took over their kingdoms, while Rudolf rose in tandem with him and Odo was installed by him. The episcopal conduits of authority in Bavaria have also already been mentioned (chapter 6.3). In that *regnum* Charles was a hands-off ruler, choosing to establish his presence by occasional well-timed personal appearances, and by dealing directly with its bishops. His charters for Bavarian recipients record no interventions made by any petitioner for third parties; the likes of the bishop of Vercelli had no direct relationship with the men of substance there. Similarly, Bavarians tended not to interfere in affairs outside their borders. The Bavarian episcopate thus seems to have presented itself as a quite self-contained group who accessed the royal ear directly.²⁷²

This could perhaps be seen as one of Charles's solutions to what has often been thought of as one of his main problems; that he was very much an Aleman. Due to links established during the period of his 'subkingship' and the first three years of his reign proper, the Alemannic *regnum* (including, in the broader sense, Alsace and Rhaetia) was a major focus of his attention, manifested most importantly in his heavy reliance on Alemans to fill court positions. This signified

²⁷² Bühner-Thierry, 'Évêques', pp.37-9, 41-4, 48-9.

a real shift from the reigns of the three previous east Frankish kings, each of whom had ruled in large part from, and with men drawn from, Bavaria and Franconia. The resentment that this could cause is evident from the invective of the Mainz annalist on behalf of Archbishop Liutbert, one of those who lost out by this new situation.

Bührer-Thierry, noting the conspicuous absence of Alemannic bishops in the charters of Charles the Fat, assumes that they were simply eclipsed by the supposedly over-mighty archchancellor.²⁷³ However, as was mentioned above, Liutward is only found intervening twice for third parties in Alemannia, including only once on his own, and even that was for his former monastery of Reichenau. Given the roots of Charles's power, it is surely more likely that what Bührer-Thierry observed can be explained by the fact that the emperor simply sought different methods of imposing himself in Alemannia from those applied in *regna* like Bavaria. His more direct involvement in the governance of this kingdom can be illustrated with reference to three different modes of royal authority.

Firstly, Charles maintained a high personal presence here, staying more often in Alemannia than in other *regna*. The region served as a central junction point on his wide-ranging itinerary, offering access to Bavaria, Italy, Franconia and Lotharingia. Favoured palaces like Bodman on the shores of Lake Constance not only provided hospitality for the imperial entourage, but also served as permanent representations of royal power while the ruler was absent.²⁷⁴ The way that Charles actively worked to establish such close personal links with individual royal sites is visible in at least one case, for which we are fortunate to have good evidence. Michael Borgolte has shown that land focused on the estate centre at Neudingen, between the sources of the Danube and the Neckar, was of special significance to the emperor.²⁷⁵ Gifts in this area were made to the custodian of the royal chapel Ruodbert on two occasions, and the court scrutiny established by these grants was enhanced in 883 by a swap of adjacent lands with the abbey of St-Gall.²⁷⁶ Charters from 882 and 887 record in their dating clauses that Ruodbert

²⁷³ Ibid, p.34.

²⁷⁴ See now Airlie, 'Palace'. See Map 7.

²⁷⁵ Borgolte, 'Karl', pp.39-49; idem, *Grafen*, p.164.

²⁷⁶ DD CIII 19, 38 and 68 respectively.

was seen as ‘missus imperatoris in vicem comitis’ and ‘vicarius’ in the region, revealing that this was a place administered with peculiarly close attention from the royal court.²⁷⁷ Charles the Fat had spent some of his pre-kingship days in control of this particular locality; and it is no coincidence that it was Neudingen to which he retreated after being dislodged by the coup in 887.²⁷⁸ It is possible, then, to characterise this keeping of the county around Neudingen free of outside influences as part of a personal politics pursued by Charles the Fat in this area of Alemannia throughout his reign. In view of this, it is significant for our purposes that the charter which transferred control of some of this region to Ruodbert was interceded for by Liutward in conjunction with Richgard, highlighting their close association with the emperor in this matter.²⁷⁹

Secondly, Charles also seems to have maintained particularly close links with the monasteries of St-Gall and Reichenau, both powerful landholders in Alemannia and the main academies for the recruitment of his court personnel. His gift of the *curtis* of Stammheim in late 879 to St. Otmar, one of the two major cults centred at St-Gall, seems to have represented a kind of symbolic atonement for the persecutions suffered by Otmar at that site in the mid-eighth century.²⁸⁰ Up until 879 Charles appears, on the evidence of Ekkehard, to have ordered that a feast should be provided for the brothers of St-Gall out of the income from his Stammheim property during the festival of Otmar, a celebration in which the king himself was in the habit of participating as ‘frater conscriptus’. The transfer of this land in that year was intended to put this arrangement on a firmer footing, setting out that it was to be used to support eight men to be in the permanent service of Otmar, and to pray daily for the king. From now on Charles, increasingly distracted by the affairs of the newly-acquired Italian kingdom, was

²⁷⁷ DD SG 620 and 657.

²⁷⁸ D SG 551 reveals his presence as *rector* in 870. Herman of Reichenau, *Chronicon*, p.109 for the retreat.

²⁷⁹ D CIII 38. Two other elements of the grant mark it out. Firstly, it was to revert after Ruodbert’s death ‘ad regiam potestatem’, and secondly it was enacted in Pavia, making it exceptional as a document issued outside the *regnum* with which it was concerned; both of these facets highlight the political importance of the transaction in the eyes of the court. Neither of the other royal charters in question name a petitioner. It is interesting to note in passing that D 38 is one of only two charters of Charles the Fat known to survive in the form of twin original copies (D 65 is the other).

²⁸⁰ D CIII 13. Borst, ‘Pfalz’, p.200 presents all the evidence.

usually only represented in the festal period by royal *nuntii*.²⁸¹ He thus established a close affinity with St. Otmar, to whom Notker referred as 'patronus vester',²⁸² creating a solemn and permanent bond between the cult and the commemoration of his own kingship.

Something similar took place at Reichenau. As we saw earlier, an annual commemoration feast, to be provisioned from the *curtis* of Erchingen which had been given by Charles to Chadolt of Novara, was established there by that bishop in the mid-880s.²⁸³ It is not implausible, therefore, that the archchancellor's acquisition of a cell 'infra monasterium', with the emperor's approval, was designed as a means of supervising the commemoration of Charles's rule in that abbey.²⁸⁴ Here again we encounter Liutward at the heart of the personal politics of the king in Alemannia.

A third means used by Charles to promote his authority in his home *regnum* is visible in his relationship with local counts. At Bodman on May 1 879, a certain Palding passed on land which he had received from Louis the German to the monastery of St-Gall for the *memoria* of that king.²⁸⁵ Three counts, Adalbert, Udalrich and Hildebold, were present, and the transaction was carried out 'ex permissio quoque ipsius domni regis Karoli'. The use of the royal palace as the venue for the proceedings, and the subsidiary condition that the fisc would reclaim the land should the memorial provisions fall short of requirements, were among the reasons why Charles the Fat's name was invoked in the charter.²⁸⁶ However, we should not regard these as exceptional circumstances. Already in 876 the same Count Adalbert had acted as Charles's representative in a swap of lands involving the abbey of Rheinau, in which the king had rights.²⁸⁷ A charter of 878 identifies him as a royal *missus*²⁸⁸, while another of 884 endows him with the exalted title of

²⁸¹ Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.6, p.28; Schmid, 'Brüderschaften'; Zotz, 'Grundlagen', p.290. In general see Schmid, '*Fratres conscripti*'.

²⁸² Notker, *Gesta*, 2.8, p.61.

²⁸³ Mabillon, *Vetera Analecta*, p.427. Its veracity is confirmed by a reference to it in D AC 35. Cf. above, c.6.4.

²⁸⁴ D CIII 92; Schmid, 'Brüderschaften', pp.185-7.

²⁸⁵ D SG vol.3 Anhang 8.

²⁸⁶ Borst, 'Pfalz', p.199; Walther, 'Fiskus', pp.255-6; Airle, 'Palace'.

²⁸⁷ D CIII 1; see Schmid, 'Königtum', esp. pp.231-2, 260-3.

²⁸⁸ D Zur 132.

dilectus comes.²⁸⁹ Hildebold was named as royal *missus* on another occasion under Charles the Fat, and also served Louis the German and Arnulf in this capacity.²⁹⁰ Udalrich was associated with him in the charter of Louis the German just cited, and was later referred to by Charles as ‘fidelissimus noster nepos’.²⁹¹ A letter of bishop Salomon II of Constance surviving from the late 870s refers to a journey he was about to undertake to the see of Strasbourg in the company of Count Udalrich and the abbot of Reichenau.²⁹² It is not specified that this was a royal mission; the letter is only a rather brisk missive to a lesser functionary. However, the high status of the legates suggest that it was; and we also know that Salomon had had cause to depend on the bishop of Strasbourg’s hospitality while on the king’s business on at least one other occasion.²⁹³ The three men present as royal representatives at Bodman in May 879 were thus by no means strangers to that role.

Men such as these were holders of multiple counties in the Alemannic *regnum*. Udalrich, for instance, as count of the Linzgau, Rheingau and Argengau (this list is not exhaustive) had interests spreading right across the south of the region.²⁹⁴ Large configurations of *honores* such as these are sometimes considered by scholars, when encountered in the late Carolingian period, to have existed as obstacles to the effective exercise of royal power.²⁹⁵ However, the decision to empower these aristocrats in this way was taken by a strong king, Louis the German, as Borgolte’s work clearly shows.²⁹⁶ Louis pursued a policy of intensifying the government of the south-west of his kingdom in the 850s, two main prongs of which were the concentration of multiple counties in the hands of individual nobles, and the setting up over them of his son Charles as *rector*. The strengthening of comital power was part and parcel of strengthening royal power. Royal fiscal lands passed into comital control not because the aristocracy

²⁸⁹ D CIII 101. Borgolte, *Grafen*, p.27 expresses some doubts about this identification.

²⁹⁰ D SG 656 (Charles); D SG 557 and D LG 124 (Louis); D Zur 159 (Arnulf). For commentary see Borgolte, *Grafen*, p.143.

²⁹¹ D CIII 57; see Borgolte, *Grafen*, pp.255-66.

²⁹² *Collectio Sangallensis*, no.36.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, no.33.

²⁹⁴ Borgolte, *Grafen*, pp.255-66 is the most convenient summary; this is Borgolte’s Udalrich IV.

²⁹⁵ Borgolte, *Geschichte*, pp.204-7, 256-8 implies this, as does Borst, ‘Pfalz’, p.200.

²⁹⁶ Borgolte, *Geschichte*, pp.245-58 for his findings in summary form.

channelled their acquisitiveness and aggression into anti-royal activities, but because the Carolingians perceived this as a more effective way of exercising authority than dealing directly with the running of estates scattered throughout the *regnum*.²⁹⁷ Thus, according to the same train of thought, the fisc near Lake Constance at Untersee was placed in the hands of Count Adalbert during the reign proper of Charles the Fat.²⁹⁸ Men like Adalbert and Udalrich, as we have seen, represented the emperor in his home kingdom in a manner analogous to that of other powerful local figures like Odo in Neustria. As we argued in the case of Odo, it is misleading to imagine Carolingian power structures in terms of the mutual exclusivity of royal and aristocratic interests, and to evaluate such interests purely by the measurement of direct control of land. A later dispute involving Conrad I over Charles's gift of Stammheim to St-Gall is a good example of how royal, aristocratic and monastic concerns could coincide in a single locality.²⁹⁹

Our analysis should rather be expressed in terms of authority, and our evidence, although sparse, indicates that strong local aristocrats such as these were happy to invoke royal authority in carrying out their affairs in Alemannia. This is no small measure of success; the most spectacular achievement of the Carolingians was that they managed for so long to perpetuate the idea that their power was natural and rightful, not that they successfully interfered in every matter of political significance within the empire.³⁰⁰ That some of these aristocrats' sons controlled duchies effectively outside royal authority in the tenth century does not justify backdating this situation to the period before 888.³⁰¹ Indeed, the fact that the region around Neudingen formed the kernel of tenth-century Alemannic ducal authority is testament more to the endurance of the

²⁹⁷ See *ibid*, pp.93-6 for an example of how a fisc could be transferred more or less intact to form a new count's *ex officio* holdings, in this case in the Zurichgau.

²⁹⁸ D SG 96.

²⁹⁹ Althoff, 'Breisach', p.469. This observation holds true even for such an apparently 'royal' location as St-Denis; see Brown, 'Politics'.

³⁰⁰ This is the argument of Airlie, 'Semper'.

³⁰¹ As does Borgolte, *Geschichte*, p.207 in a discussion of the absorption of the western Lake Constance area into the duchy of Alemannia early in the tenth century. In fact, the three protagonists in the struggle for control he talks about were the brothers Burchard and Adalbert III, and Erchangar. The fathers of these men were Adalbert II and the count of the palace Berthold respectively, both of whom we have already met as servants of Charles the Fat in the 870s and 880s, very much on the same side. This reveals the flaw in Borgolte's argument that their struggle

power structures established by Charles the Fat than to their frailty.³⁰² Where we catch glimpses of Charles's relationships with the prominent Alemannic counts, then, we see a channel of authority which allowed him to intervene effectively in local politics when he thought it necessary.³⁰³ This channel, moreover, was one which had been opened up by Louis the German in the 850s, when he had set up his youngest son as *rector* over a relatively small number of interrelated and multi-beneficed aristocrats.

6.6.5: The 'monastic empire' of the Empress Richgard

From the above discussion it will hopefully be clear that Charles's methods of government in Alemannia included a number of different forms of what may be termed personal politics, involving links between his court and various individuals and institutions. The lack of prescriptive sources makes it difficult at times to excavate the roles of court figures in all this, but both the archchancellor and the empress have emerged as crucial links at various points in the chain. That Richgard was considered to be involved at the very highest level of decision making is emphasised by a reference to her in an imperial charter as 'consors regni'.³⁰⁴ This term, which is applied to no other person during Charles's reign, was used in the ninth century to denote an individual who was party to the prerogatives of the ruler.³⁰⁵ This is illuminated by an allusive story of Notker, portraying Charlemagne's wife Hildegard acting as the custodian of royal power while the king was off fighting the Avars, which can be read as a veiled reference to the position of Richgard in the time Notker was writing.³⁰⁶ In Notker's

can be traced back to party antagonisms built up in Charles's reign, for which there is no direct evidence.

³⁰² Borgolte, 'Karl', pp.47-8; Zotz, 'Grundlagen', p.292.

³⁰³ Note also the case of Gozbert II, named in 886 as an imperial *missus* (D SG 656), for whom Charles intervened to consolidate as count around Rheinau; Schmid, 'Königtum', p.278; Borgolte, *Geschichte*, p.255.

³⁰⁴ D CIII 42 from October 881, unfortunately not an original.

³⁰⁵ Rosenwein, 'Family Politics', p.257 with n.41 for further references. See also Erkens, 'Esther'. AFC s.a.882 p.99 says that Charles made the Viking leader Godafrið into his *consors regni*, which, in the polemical context of this annal, can be taken as a negative example reinforcing the point. Cf. Nelson, 'Rites'.

³⁰⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.17, pp.21-2; Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.140. Löwe thought that Notker was here hinting darkly at Richgard stepping outside the limits of her position, but the story is not at all critical of the queen, who is depicted as defending royal authority against the unseemly ambition of a recalcitrant bishop. Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330 understood Richgard's imperial consecration

vignette, the control of royal authority is symbolised by access to Charlemagne's golden sceptre; but we are further entitled to ask what resources the historical Richgard had at her disposal to help exercise this share in sovereign power.

A striking answer to this question is provided by the number of abbeys which were placed in her hands by her husband, which amounted, in the words of Arno Borst, to 'virtually an Alemannic monastic empire'.³⁰⁷ By the end of 881 she had been put in control of the convents of Säcking, SS Felix and Regula in Zurich, St-Marinus in Pavia and her own foundation of Andlau in Alsace, as well as the male monastery of Zurzach.³⁰⁸ She also seems to have spent an unknown length of time as abbess of St-Stephen in Strasbourg, probably before marrying Charles.³⁰⁹ These institutions were all placed in her hands in order to cement their special ties with the royal house; it is no coincidence, surely, that the allusion to her as *consors regni* appears in the charter of one of these grants. This aim is further illustrated by the terms of the gifts; Säcking and Zurich, for example, were to revert after Richgard's death 'ad regiam potestatem', while St-Marinus was to be ruled by Charles himself if he outlived his wife.³¹⁰ While it was standard Carolingian practice for female members of the family to be placed at the heads of such religious institutions, the Empress Richgard's holdings are distinguished in their number and scale, and help give the lie to the idea that the dynasty was losing control of its monasteries in the 880s.³¹¹ The landed power of some of these houses was formidable. Andlau, for instance, controlled extensive resources both in Alsace and across the Rhine in the Breisgau, including lands which had belonged to Richgard's family, and hence which were not previously under the sway of the Carolingians.³¹² Its dependencies included institutions as prestigious as Bonmoutier and Étival, both of which were Carolingian royal

of 881 to have raised her to the position of *consors regni*. On Notker's allusions to contemporary events, see below, c.7.

³⁰⁷ Borst, 'Pfalz', p.200.

³⁰⁸ DD CIII 7 (Feb.878, Säcking and Zurich), 42 (Oct.881, Pavia), 96 (Feb. 884, Andlau), 43 (Oct. 881, Zurzach) are the key charters. On the status of Zurzach see Geuenich, 'Zurzach'. For the following, see Map 8.

³⁰⁹ Geuenich, 'Richkart'.

³¹⁰ Cf. Zotz, 'Grundlagen', p.283 on how royal monasteries formed a distinct group which could act as a special focus for the gifts of the aristocracy.

³¹¹ De Jong, 'Monasticism', pp.627, 651. See also above, c.3.4.

monasteries.³¹³ Zurzach, meanwhile, commanded access to an important bridge over the upper Rhine on a route which led north into the heart of Alemannia and west into Transjurane Burgundy, two regions of great importance in the reign of Charles the Fat.³¹⁴

The empress's control of SS Felix and Regula in Zurich is worthy of note for more than simply the extent of its properties. The convent had been effectively founded by Louis the German in 853 as a means of controlling royal lands in the Zürichsee area in place of part of the fiscal network which he dismantled at around this time, and more generally as part of his intensification of government in the south-west during the 850s.³¹⁵ The abbacy was held in turn by Louis' eldest daughter Hildegard until her death in 856 and then, after a short period when the incumbent was none other than Lothar II's infamous first wife Waldrada, his youngest, Bertha.³¹⁶ Under Bertha the convent acquired royal immunity and protection in a charter of 863 co-signed by the newly-wed *rector* of the region, Charles the Fat.³¹⁷ Its Carolingian credentials were thus impeccable.

To begin with, the convent's properties were focused in the immediate vicinity of Zurich, and were almost exclusively donations of the king and his family; the local nobility tended to patronise the nearby male foundations at Rheinau and St-Gall instead.³¹⁸ However, the scope of the abbey's influence took a new turn when it acquired new properties in Alsace in March 877 at the gift of its abbess Bertha: an examination of this gift provides some interesting insights.³¹⁹ Bertha's grant was made only eight days before her death (d.26 March 877), and

³¹² See Büttner, *Geschichte*, pp.139-41, 295-301. Andlau was thus helpful in binding Alsace and Alemannia together.

³¹³ D CIII 96 (interestingly, a charter quite possibly drafted by Liutward himself) and D Rich 1 for their association with Andlau. Their appearance in the list of royal resources in the Treaty of Meersen (AB s.a.870, pp.172-4) is evidence of their royal status. Later documents reveal that Richgard also had relationships with the houses of Ebersheimmünster, Eschau and Gengebach: see Kehr's preamble to D Rich 1.

³¹⁴ See Reinle, *Verena*, pp.11-2; Schmid, 'Königtum', pp.225-8, 231-2 (discussing also the neighbouring nodal point and royal estate at Eschenz); Geuenich, 'Zurzach', pp.30-1 (noting the important market).

³¹⁵ D LG 67. A count was also installed as part of the same policy; see Borgolte, *Geschichte*, pp.78-101, esp. 92-6.

³¹⁶ Geuenich, 'Anfängen'.

³¹⁷ D LG 110. Louis the German maintained a degree of direct influence over the area: D 82 from 857 grants the church of St-Peter's in Zurich to the royal *fidelis* Berold.

³¹⁸ A glance through the Zurich *Urkundenbuch* makes this clear.

³¹⁹ D Zur 131.

one of its conditions was that her brother Charles the Fat would issue a royal confirmation charter to enhance it. This Charles did, but not until March 878, a full year later.³²⁰ Why the delay? The answer, I suggest, lies in the fact that Queen Richgard was not installed as proprietor of the abbey until February 878.³²¹ Charles was withholding his confirmation until his wife could be put in office, ensuring that the Alsatian possessions donated by Bertha would end up in her hands.³²² The scale of these properties (12 manses with appurtenances) was not especially impressive. However, an analysis of their history reveals that their political significance was greater than it may appear at first sight, and helps explain why the king was so keen that they came into the control of his wife.

The lands in question had been given to Bertha personally and ‘in proprietatem’ by Lothar II in 869 to thank her for intervening with her parents on his behalf during his divorce case.³²³ They lay in the *villae* of Schlettstadt, Kienzheim, Kinzheim, Altheim, Karsbach and Ammerschwihl, all in Alsace, and primarily in the northern half of that *regnum*.³²⁴ We know that at least three of these *villae* had earlier been foci for the holdings of Erchangar, a prominent count based in northern Alsace (d.865/6) who also happened to be the father of Richgard.³²⁵ He had received Kinzheim from Emperor Lothar I in 843, probably as the price for his support during the civil wars, and subsequently used it as a

³²⁰ D CIII 8. D 71 from 883 is a general (this time imperial) confirmation of the house’s privileges and properties.

³²¹ D CIII 7. Although the documents do not clearly spell out her role, Richgard was probably the *rectrix* rather than the abbess of her nunneries: this situation allowed her influence over the lands and political involvement of the houses, while freeing her from the liturgical obligations required of an active abbess; see Becher, ‘Frauenkloster’, pp.308-10 on this kind of division of labour. Charles’s charter grants her the abbey ‘sub usufructario’; see Fischer, ‘Monasterium’, pp.165-6.

³²² In the meantime he seems to have taken over the running of the convent himself: the advocate Willehar presided over the dispute recorded in D Zur 140 (876X880) explicitly on the authority of Charles. In D 130 (Dec. 876) the same man was described as Bertha’s advocate. D 140 should therefore probably be dated to the interregnum between the death of Bertha and the appointment of Richgard.

³²³ D Zur 131; D L2 34.

³²⁴ D L2 34 only mentions Schlettstadt and Ammerschwihl by name, but Bertha’s charter D Zur 131 is clear that all the properties she donates to SS Felix and Regula were given her personally by Lothar, presumably on the same occasion. The latter document omits Ammerschwihl, but we know from the former that this was one of the *villae* in question. The omission was probably accidental, which would explain why it was thought necessary to concoct the subsequent forgery D CIII 174, which records Zurich’s right to Ammerschwihl.

³²⁵ See Borgolte, ‘Karl’, pp.36-9 on his identity.

base from which to expand his influence.³²⁶ In addition, we know from Lothar II's original gift to Bertha in 869 that the king dispossessed a certain 'Ercengarius puer', presumably the count's son, in order to make the grant of Schlettstadt and Ammerschwihr.³²⁷ We may further assume that the other goods held by Bertha were also originally in the hands of Erchangar's family.³²⁸ What the 869 deed reveals, therefore, is a major political setback for Erchangar's family in the wake of his death, with Lothar taking advantage of the minority of the count's son to dispossess him and use his properties to curry favour with the family of Louis the German at a crucial point in his controversial divorce case. The fate of the family was then sealed in the aftermath of Lothar's death in August 869, when the count's nephew Bernard jumped the wrong way in the Carolingian scramble for Lotharingia, unluckily for him backing Charles the Bald against the eventual ruler of Alsace, Louis the German.³²⁹

In other words, the Alsatian locations which Richgard's nunnery in Zurich received from the dying princess Bertha in 877 were properties with a longstanding connection to the queen's immediate family, a connection which had been severed by Lothar II's diplomatic machinations at the end of the 860s. Richgard thus had a double claim on them, partly as family property, and partly as an element of the property subject to her as *rectrix* of the royal convent of SS Felix and Regula in Zurich, as it were *ex officio*. To put it another way, the properties represented a convergence of her public and private jurisdictions. This explains why Charles delayed his confirmation of Bertha's endowment until Richgard was in charge of that institution: he was making absolutely sure that his wife would be the ultimate recipient and would make good this double claim, reasserting her control over properties which had earlier been dragged away from

³²⁶ D L 69. Geuenich, '*Richkart*', p.107, and Borgolte, '*Grafengewalt*', p.29 claim, on the basis of D L 133 from 854, that Erchangar lost this property in a dispute and fell out of favour with Lothar. However, the text only says that the dispute, which was with the cell at Leberau, was resolved by the count returning a wood he had usurped, not by having Kinzheim removed from him by the emperor.

³²⁷ D L 2 34.

³²⁸ Borgolte, '*Grafengewalt*', p.33. The fact that this is certainly the case for all those properties we can trace strenghtens this assumption; the following passage provides a context for this assertion.

her family by the ebb and flow of dynastic politics, and thus reactivating the standing of her family in northern Alsace. It is possible that he himself persuaded his sick sister Bertha to make the gift to the abbey with this very plan in mind: as we saw, his confirmation charter was issued at her request, and we do know of royal agents with close connections to the Zurich foundation under Bertha.³³⁰

The ways in which this 'double claim' was manifested in the politics of the reign of Charles the Fat are instructive. It is worth highlighting the fact that Richgard is not actually visible as active in Zurich itself at all: all the nunnery's business was carried out by advocates.³³¹ Her attentions were focused instead at Andlau, the abbey in Alsace which she had founded on lands which she received as a morning gift from Louis the German on the occasion of her marriage in 861/2.³³² Here she took care to gather and preserve all the documents relating to the holdings of her family, and not just those concerning Andlau.³³³ It was hence Andlau which formed the focus for her commemoration of her family's control of its restored power base, including those parts of it which she commanded as *rectrix* of SS Felix and Regula in Zurich. However, it must be stressed that after 876 she ruled Andlau not purely as proprietor of an *Eigenkloster*, but also as a queen. An imperial charter of 884 indicates that the empress perceived clearly the coincidence of authorities invested in her position in Alsace. In this document, the emperor's *fidelis* Othbert was granted *mansi* in the *villa* of Marlenheim in recognition of the assiduousness of his obedience for one lifetime, after which the goods were to revert to Andlau.³³⁴ This *villa*, interestingly, had probably been in the possession of Richgard's father from the later 820s onwards.³³⁵ In addition, it was the site of a royal palace used by both the Merovingians and the Carolingians,

³²⁹ AB s.a.869, p.168. Hincmar's annal implies that he had little choice. See Borgolte, 'Grafengewalt', p.33 for this identification of the Bernard mentioned here and passim for the context.

³³⁰ Such as the chaplain Perihilo and perhaps the notary Liutfred: DD Zur 139 and 219; Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, p.195.

³³¹ Eg. D Zur 145 from 883; cf. the general comments of Steinmann, *Benediktinerinnenabtei*, p.18.

³³² D LG 108. Andlau's foundation narrative is given by D CIII 96.

³³³ These are the so-called Statutes of Andlau: Bruckner, *Regesta*, no.656.

³³⁴ D CIII 95.

³³⁵ Bruckner, *Regesta*, no.470.

and had been used as such by as recent a ruler as Lothar II.³³⁶ This charter therefore strengthens our appreciation of the political significance of the landholdings of Erchangar and his family in the region. More importantly, however, it reveals that Richgard's use of the monastery as a focus for the preservation of the memory of her family's rights and the reestablishment of its prominence in Alsace was mirrored by a recognition of her husband's right to use it as a focus for the rewards of royal *fideles*. Her family lands were clearly acknowledged to be integrated into royal politics.³³⁷

A final element of this discussion brings the archchancellor Liutward back into view. In January 881, while en route to receive his imperial coronation, Charles engineered a swap of lands between Liutward and the episcopal church of Chur in Rhaetia. Liutward handed over a selection of churches in Vorarlberg and south Tirol, which he held as life benefices from the king, and received in return an enormous grant of 150 *mansi* in Alsace, in the *villae* of Schlettstadt, Kinzheim, Breitenheim and Winzenheim.³³⁸ Zotz has convincingly placed this document into the context of royal palace policy: Schlettstadt was Charles's only *palatium* in Alsace, the prime focus of his authority there, and Zotz shows that his reign is the most likely time for the construction of an Aachen-style rotunda, 22 metres in diameter, the foundations of which were discovered at the turn of the last century under the church of St. George. This gift of land to Liutward can thus be seen as a measure taken by the king to reclaim the *locus regius* and church of Schlettstadt and allow the creation of a palace reminiscent of Aachen at a time when the latter was still in the hands of Louis the Younger.³³⁹ The very deliberate nature of this project is highlighted by the unusual nature of the charter concerned: rather than

³³⁶ D L2 28. Theuderic II was brought up at Marlenheim: Zotz, 'Elsaß', p.51. See also Astronomer, *Vita*, c.48, p.478 for a visit by Lothar I after taking his father captive in 833. On the importance of the *villa* as the centre of a network of lands see Büttner, *Geschichte*, p.300.

³³⁷ D CIII 41 from 881 is an analogous case in which property ordinarily used for the upkeep of the canons in Zurich (see D Zur 37 for this information) was given to a royal *fidelis*, after whose death they would revert to SS Felix and Regula. Richgard's grant of the royal monastery of Étival to Andlau was expressly made at Charles's 'ortatu et consilio': D Rich 1. D CIII 24 from 880 shows Charles adding royal confirmation to a distribution of Andlau's properties made by Richgard. This interplay between family property and royal authority is also visible in the relationship between the Empress Engelberga and her abbey: see La Rocca, 'Reine', pp.281-3. Cf. Stafford, 'Queens', pp.19-20.

³³⁸ D CIII 30; cf. D Bünd 75.

³³⁹ Zotz, 'Tradition', pp.81-4.

taking the form of a royal confirmation of a swap already agreed, the king, probably taking advantage of an episcopal vacancy, simply stated that he wished the swap to take place.³⁴⁰ In a fashion similar to that which we saw with regards to the royal estate of Neudingen, Charles included Liutward in the close control of specific areas which were of special importance to him.

But Richgard must also have played a part here, as she had done in Neudingen. As we saw, Schlettstadt and Kinzheim at least were *villae* with which she had intimate connections through both family and institutional relationships. Charles was here making northern Alsace, and especially the area around Schlettstadt, into his place through the medium of both his wife and his chief counsellor. The gift to Liutward must have consolidated him and Richgard together as a force to be reckoned with in the region; in a sense it added more pieces to the jigsaw of royal presence in northern Alsace. It was made as the royal couple journeyed to Italy to receive the imperial dignity, an occasion at which Andlau's position would be sealed by being placed in the protection of St. Peter.³⁴¹ The timing thus implies a connection between these events and the gift of lands to Liutward; it ensured king, queen and archchancellor would stand together at the centre of a web of property and power relations which articulated itself in the construction of the imperial palace at Schlettstadt.

The palace was of special importance in 881 because Aachen itself was in the kingdom of Louis the Younger (as was Lorsch, another key site of Carolingian legitimacy), and Alsace was on the frontier of Charles's kingdom. However, the region's importance did not diminish once these circumstances changed. Charles never visited Aachen: Schlettstadt remained the main physical focus of his power in the *regnum Hlotharii* throughout his reign, sustaining his entourage there while he was present, and standing as a monument to his authority when he was not. The palace and its hinterland, founded on properties controlled by the king through his wife and archchancellor, continued to articulate Charles's rule in

³⁴⁰ D CIII 30 is, unfortunately, a late cartulary copy. However, the confirmation charter D AC 9 refers to the original document in exactly these terms, stressing the agency of Charles in engineering the swap.

³⁴¹ D CIII 96 gives some details.

Alsace, control of which remained as vital as it had throughout the Carolingian period.³⁴²

These arrangements would not, however, have been destroyed by the events of summer 887, when both empress and archchancellor left court. In the case of Liutward, we can infer from an imperial charter of 887 issued for his *nepos* that the disgraced archchancellor had lost lands in the wake of his deposition: the *nepos* had lost out as well and was now being compensated.³⁴³ Probably included among the bishop's losses were the Alsatian possessions which he had swapped with the church of Chur in 881. These may have reverted to the direct control of the emperor himself: this measure would have been fairly simple if the see was still vacant at this time.³⁴⁴ Moreover, the properties were certainly part of the royal fisc when Otto the Great decided to return them to Chur in 952.³⁴⁵

For her part, Richgard remained at Andlau, which was built on her morning gift, a set of lands therefore specifically intended to support a single woman (usually a widow). The empress seems to have colluded in her divorce, and so was presumably quite able to continue exercising her functions as proprietor of her abbeys: there is no evidence that she lost control of any of these before Charles's death.³⁴⁶ After his death, however, her monastic empire began to fragment. Arnulf had installed count Eberhard as 'dominus' of SS Felix and Regula in Zurich by 889, depriving Richgard of the part of her family's Alsatian lands which were attached to that institution.³⁴⁷ Eberhard belonged to a prominent Alsatian aristocratic family, and his association with the Zurich abbey shows Arnulf's appreciation of its significance for control of Alsace, which now formed

³⁴² On palaces as mediums of royal authority, see Airlie, 'Palace'; on the political importance of Alsace, see Zoltz, 'Elsaß', esp. pp.57-64. On the spiritual bonds between Alemannia and Alsace in Charles's reign see Geuenich, 'Elsaßbeziehungen'.

³⁴³ D CIII 170.

³⁴⁴ As it had been in 881. Unfortunately the evidence does not allow certainty on this question, beyond the fact that there was a bishop of Chur installed by early 888: see the commentary in DD Bünd, p.498.

³⁴⁵ D OG 157. D 167 from 953 confirms the restoration and adds to the list another set of properties in the Strasbourg and Schlettstadt areas which were therefore perhaps also included in the original transfer of Chur lands to Liutward. D AC 9 from 888 confirms the Rhaetian lands of Chur but is tellingly silent on the Alsace properties, which had clearly not reverted to the bishopric in the meantime.

³⁴⁶ Similarly, the Empress Engelberga was able to maintain a very high political profile after Louis II's death, partly by virtue of her own monastic empire. Cf. also Hyam, 'Ermentrude', pp.163-4.

³⁴⁷ D Zur 153: 'sub dominatione Eberharti comitis'.

a crucial frontier zone in his struggle against Rudolf I, the former *marchio*.³⁴⁸ The community at Andlau, meanwhile, took to tampering with charters in an attempt to reestablish its hold over the lost Alsatian lands, while the nuns at Zurich produced a counter-forgery to close a documentary loophole in their own claim.³⁴⁹ Ultimately the abbey of SS Felix and Regula, backed by a series of royal patrons, won the day: Otto the Great confirmed its possession of the north Alsatian properties in 952.³⁵⁰ The powerful family of Erchangar and Richgard, having been dispossessed once in the aftermath of the death of Lothar II, therefore lost out again after that of Charles the Fat.

6.6.6: Conclusion

The blunt nature of the sources can be a hindrance to the study of the governance of late Carolingian east Francia, and forces us to infer scraps of information from the course of events. From these it is clear that both Richgard and Liutward were extremely important in the 'policy-making' of Charles the Fat, and that frequently they acted together in the execution of these policies. The emperor, the empress and the archchancellor can be said to have sat together at the centre of a kind of network of personal politics reaching out in various directions to carry out projects closely related to the court and the maintenance of royal power.

This conclusion provides us with a context for accepting the connection made by Regino between Liutward's expulsion from court and the royal divorce in summer 887. We have seen that the archchancellor's influence was built more or less exclusively on his position at court and his personal relationship with the imperial couple. He was no vice-regent of Italy, but rather a man without any deep roots who was sent out to represent Charles in various different contexts.

³⁴⁸ On Eberhard see Vollmer, 'Etichonen', pp.176-8; Borgolte, 'Grafengewalt', pp.39-41 (although I see no basis for his assertion that Eberhard was in position by 886); Rappmann and Zettler, *Mönchsgemeinschaft*, p.470. Eberhard married into the ducal house of Alemannia: once more, the structures established in the reign of Charles the Fat were crucial in the shaping of tenth-century political geography.

³⁴⁹ Andlau: see the interpolated D L2 34; cf. Bruckner, *Regesta*, no.656. Zurich: D CIII 174, and see above, n.324.

³⁵⁰ D OG 146. On the other hand, the hold of Richgard and her family on Andlau itself was strengthened by D LC 68 and D CS 125.

While he enjoyed the ruler's favour, his position was secure; as soon as he lost it, he had nothing to fall back on. It is evidently untrue to say that Charles 'could not do without this man', because after summer 887 this is exactly what he did do.³⁵¹ Rather, it was Liutward who could not do without Charles. The emperor was in control of these events, they were not foisted upon him.³⁵²

So, although the details escape us, the evidence permits us to conclude that somehow Liutward's influence at court, which was indeed privileged, had by 887 become closely linked to the position of the empress. When Charles hatched a plan to divorce his wife and remarry in the hope of producing a legitimate heir, a plan to which Richgard seems to have acquiesced, Liutward saw his position threatened and opposed him. Charles, who had little time for such politicking when issues of much greater import, like the continuation of the Carolingian line, were at stake, proceeded to relieve him of his duties and hand them over to the obvious replacement, Liutbert of Mainz. The Mainz annalist, clearly not one to be gracious in victory, attempted to blacken Liutward's name further by claiming that he fled to Arnulf and helped plot Charles's downfall.³⁵³ This seems, on the whole, to be more invective than fact.³⁵⁴ The fallen archchancellor does not figure at all in Arnulf's reign as a man of distinction, and presumably retired to Vercelli; certainly, he was later killed in Lombardy during a Magyar attack.³⁵⁵ There is therefore no justification for seeing the removal of Liutward as the spur for the coup; he did not engineer it, nor was he so important that his fall rendered the emperor vulnerable. We must look elsewhere to explain where the impetus came from. Charles, and not his fallen archchancellor, was the key figure in deciding the course of events in 887.

The contrasting fates of the empress and the archchancellor are instructive. An indication of how Charles sought to remove all trace of his wife from court is given by the fact that she was henceforth purged from the prayer provisions of

³⁵¹ Keller, 'Sturz', p.340.

³⁵² Cf. Reuter, *Germany*, p.119.

³⁵³ AFC s.a.887, p.106.

³⁵⁴ Bühner-Thierry, 'Conseiller', p.121.

³⁵⁵ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.901, p.148; cf. Sierck, *Festtag*, pp.240-1

imperial charters, a measure designed to reinforce the annulling of the marriage.³⁵⁶ Nevertheless, her retreat was seen, on the evidence of the *Vita Verenae*, as honourable and virtuous. Liutward, on the other hand, was subjected to a much more virulent form of *damnatio memoriae*. While Richgard was buried (c.900) in her own church at Andlau, and was recognised as a saint by Pope Leo IX in 1049, Liutward's obituary was not even entered into the memorial book of Reichenau, the monastery where he had been brought up and where other members of his family were commemorated along with the Carolingians and their deceased *fideles*. His long career in service to Charles the Fat ended abruptly and bitterly, and stands as eloquent testimony to the precarious position of those aristocrats whose power rested too much on the changeable favour of Carolingian kings.

6.7: The deposition of Charles the Fat, November 887

Historians have, therefore, been too willingly seduced into crediting the protagonists of the events of the year 887 with great ideological agendas and with the foreknowledge that the Carolingian empire's fate was sealed. The traditional and still-accepted versions of this fate, which rely on the postulation of assumed long-term trends like the rise of the aristocracy and the demise of royal authority, all stress that it could not have been different, that the outcome of 887 was inevitable and had been coming for a long time. However, this chapter has attempted to show that by stripping away the *Verfassungsgechichtliche* baggage which customarily attends accounts of the events of 887, and by eliminating our own knowledge of their consequences for the rise of France, Germany and 'feudalism', we can understand them as the outcome of a very specific set of political circumstances and decisions, and see quite clearly that things could indeed have been different.

In this case the key circumstance was the unravelling of the Carolingian family settlement of 880 due to the unpredictable deaths of the heirless Louis the Younger, Louis III and Carloman II; only these events made Charles the Fat's succession plans so vitally significant. The key decision, in light of this, was

³⁵⁶ D CIII 168 is especially interesting since the charter from which it was almost totally copied *did* include the king's *coniunx* in the prayer clause; see Ewig, 'Gebetsdienst', p.75.

Charles's determined obstruction of Arnulf's hopes of sharing in the succession after his acts of rebellion during the Wilhelminer war: Charles's obduracy led ultimately to his deposition. Of course, Arnulf was still not a legitimate Carolingian but, had he taken over as an approved imperial heir rather than as a usurper, would the *reguli* have had the same justification and confidence in ascending their own thrones? At a stage prior to this, if Hadrian III had not died in 885 and Bernard had been publicly designated as an heir, would Arnulf have had the same justification in revolting? What if the emperor had turned to Charles the Simple? We cannot answer any of these questions, but simply posing them highlights the fact that the outcome was not inevitable. Chance and the course of events played their part in bringing about the end of the Carolingian empire, just as they had in determining every other turn in the course of its history.

It was the divorce and remarriage plan, as the first of Charles's schemes to show any signs of success, which must have finally convinced Arnulf that an open rebellion was his best realistic chance of acquiring a throne. If the emperor could watch the Bernard plan fail twice and still leave him out in the cold, surely his way was definitively blocked. Motive coincided with opportunity. Two years of peace with Zwentibald had allowed him to recover his strength after the setbacks of the Wilhelminer war. The Moravians, moreover, were always fickle friends of Carolingian rulers, and alliances on and across the eastern frontier characteristically shifted with great speed. In the same way that a coincidence of interests had made Zwentibald a natural ally of Charles against Arnulf in 884, by late 887 the latter's proximity may have given the ambitious *dux* cause to reassess his priorities: it is significant that a large force of Slavs, presumably including Moravians, figured prominently in the rising against the emperor.³⁵⁷

We can surmise that Arnulf's other supporters in his coup likewise came from the south-eastern corner of the empire. Evidence for this comes from the high number of charters, including those to an unprecedented number of individual laymen, which he made in that region during the earliest phase of his

³⁵⁷ AFC s.a.887, p.106; Bowlus, 'Early History', p.564.

reign.³⁵⁸ Several of these make an explicit connection between Arnulf's accession and the fact that the new king felt himself in such men's debt. For example, a grant to the *miles* Engilger was issued 'recordantes crebri servicii nobis per illum facti, priusquam regium nomen acciperemus.'³⁵⁹ Arnulf, left by and large to his own devices in the south east after Christmas 885, had had time to cement his relationship with men like these. They, moreover, stood to suffer the same exclusion as he did if Bavaria and its marches remained a neglected *Fernzone* under the rule of another Alemannic king.³⁶⁰ Regional aristocracies such as these had become accustomed to having kings close at hand, in Bavaria since the reign of Louis the German, and the reunification of the empire under Charles had made *Königsnähe* a scarce resource.³⁶¹ These tensions and circumstances were not unique to the position of Arnulf in 885-7: they are the hallmarks of the classic generational (and geographical) rivalries which had been an endemic feature of Frankish politics since at least the sixth century. Arnulf rebelled for substantially the same reasons as had, say, Pippin the Hunchback or Charles the Bald's son Carloman, and he found an aristocratic constituency in much the same way as them. He was not, nor did he consider himself to be, the representative of a particular class or the standard bearer of a new age in European history.

As for the actual course of events, our sources are difficult to resolve.³⁶² Four narratives provide specific dates and places. The Mainz and Hildesheim annalists, along with Regino, place the arrival of Arnulf and the defection of the nobles at a general assembly convened at Tribur around the time of the feast of St. Martin (11 November).³⁶³ The Bavarian annalist, on the other hand, states that the deed was done at Frankfurt.³⁶⁴ Charles's last known imperial charter, although badly corrupted by later forgers, seems to have been issued at Frankfurt on 17

³⁵⁸ For example: DD AC 5, 8, 15-7, 20-2, 32, 42-4. See Reindel, 'Arnulf', p.205; Bowlus, *Franks*, pp.230-2; Schieffer, 'Karl', p.140 (and passim on the longer-term process of installation of Arnulf's old allies, like the relatives of William and Engelschalk, into key *honores*). Von Gladiß, 'Schenkungen', p.84 provides comparative statistics.

³⁵⁹ D AC 17.

³⁶⁰ The same consideration, the desire for accessible kingship, also motivated some Alemans to support Bernard in a counter-revolt against Arnulf in 890-1.

³⁶¹ Innes, *State*, pp.221-4.

³⁶² See BM 1765 for full references to the contemporary and later sources.

³⁶³ AFC s.a.887, p.106; AH s.a.887, p.19; Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, pp.127-8.

³⁶⁴ BC s.a.887, p.115.

November, while Arnulf issued his first royal one ten days later in the same place.³⁶⁵ Charles subsequently retired to Alemannia, either on a pension generously provided by Arnulf, or to rally his supporters to mount resistance.³⁶⁶ Either way, the emperor was not long for this world, expiring of unknown natural causes on 13 January 888.³⁶⁷

Much scholarly effort has been expended on trying to coax precision from these sources in order to build a clear narrative of events between the key dates of 11 and 27 November. Most attempts, from Keller's comprehensive and influential 1966 article 'Zum Sturz Karls III.' onwards, have focused on resolving the apparent doubts in contemporary minds about where, when and how Charles was actually deposed: was it Tribur or Frankfurt, and what transpired there?³⁶⁸ However, the very fact that equally plausible but mutually contradictory answers to these questions have been suggested by historians leads one to suspect that, as Reuter has pointed out, the sources available will not bear the pressure which has to be laid upon them in order to make the attempt.³⁶⁹ Accordingly, only some general points will be made here.

The partisan character of the Mainz and Bavarian annalists has already been stressed. The Mainz author presented the rising as a sudden coup, in keeping with his view of Arnulf as a usurper, while his Bavarian counterpart played up Charles's illness as the spark to a supposedly realm-wide magnate conspiracy in order to justify the deposition. Regino, on the other hand, took a more equivocal line. Although he was writing for the court of Arnulf's son Louis the Child, he was also, as we have seen, not without sympathy for Charles the Fat. Moreover, he regarded the coup and consequent shattering of the Carolingian hegemony as a tragedy. This willingness to see both sides of the situation lends Regino's testimony an extra credibility. Two things are clear from his version: firstly that

³⁶⁵ D CIII 172; D AC 1.

³⁶⁶ With Arnulf's permission: Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128; BC s.a.887, p.115 (after failing to start a resistance war). AFC s.a.887, p.106 simply says that Charles 'in Alamanniam repedavit.'

³⁶⁷ BC s.a.887, p.116 gives the date. Cf. BM 1765d. AV s.a.887, p.64 mentions a rumour that his own men strangled him.

³⁶⁸ Keller, 'Sturz', pp.347-73. For critiques of Keller, see Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien*, pp.38-48; Bund, *Thronsturz*, pp.477-89; Reuter, *Germany*, pp.119-20. Kehr, 'Tagen' is the most significant pre-Keller article.

³⁶⁹ Reuter, *Annals*, p.103, n.8.

the deposition of Charles and the elevation of Arnulf took place at a single assembly, and secondly that the defection of the leading men was spurred by their observation of the gravity of the emperor's illness.³⁷⁰ Tellingly, even the Bavarian annals, despite their author's elaboration of a long-term conspiracy theory, also back up the single assembly point: 'veniente Karolo imperatore Franconofurt isti [the nobles] invitaverunt Arnolfum filium Karlmanni regis ipsumque ad seniorelem eligerunt, sine mora statuerunt ad regem extolli.'³⁷¹ As Regino made out, Arnulf and his retinue must already have been present at the assembly. The abbot of Prüm's emphasis on Charles's illness at this point is also believable: after all, he was dead of natural causes, at the age of only 48, within two months.³⁷²

All this backs up Regino's implication of a somewhat on-the-spot decision made by the nobles to invite Arnulf to take over the throne, and jars with the long-term conspiracy depicted by the Bavarian annalist. The account of the latter is further discredited by the charter evidence for Arnulf's supporters discussed earlier: it was not Thuringian, Saxon or even Franconian nobles whose help he rewarded after his succession, but rather men from the south east and the marches. In light of this, the Mainz continuator's report of the rising as a sudden coup pushed through by surprise and a display of force begins to look more plausible. A likely reconstruction, taking into account all these elements of the narrative sources, begins with Charles summoning an assembly for magnates from throughout the east Frankish kingdom, perhaps to make a further announcement on the succession issue. Arnulf, ready to press his claims by force since hearing of the emperor's divorce in the summer, turned up unexpectedly with a large armed retinue. Seeing Charles's poor state of health and considering the uncertain status of the succession, the assembled magnates were mentally primed to be sympathetic to the claims of his nephew, especially given his military backing. An analogy with the Field of Lies in 833 suggests itself, as another occasion on which rival Carolingians had stood face to face with each other while the short-term calculations of aristocratic opinion decided the outcome. Like Louis the

³⁷⁰ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.127.

³⁷¹ BC s.a.887, p.115.

³⁷² AV s.a.887, p.64 supports Regino's interpretation of the single assembly and the emperor's illness.

Pious's on that occasion, Charles's support melted away almost to nothing, including his closest advisers: 'concussis timore Alamannis, quibus maxime negotium sui regni habebat commissum, omnes penitus ab eo defecerunt.'³⁷³

Both continuations of the *Annales Fuldenses* tell us that Charles sent Arnulf an embassy: the Bavarian author said it carried gifts symbolic of submission, while the Mainz author stated it bore the fragment of the True Cross on which Arnulf had sworn loyalty to Charles, to persuade him to remember his faith.³⁷⁴ Either way, there is nothing in any source to suggest a formal deposition ceremony or tonsuring.³⁷⁵ Even when such a procedure had been attempted, against Louis the Pious in 833, it proved ultimately unsuccessful: Carolingian politics were not governed by such rigid norms and laws, and moments of tension were often resolved with a fair degree of improvisation. As long as Charles lived there was always a chance that the pendulum could swing back in his favour, as it had in Louis's in 834. This ambiguity is highlighted by the fact that Regino refers to Arnulf as *rex* after the coup, yet continues to call Charles *imperator* until his death.³⁷⁶ The sources disagree as to whether Charles retired to Alemannia on Arnulf's authority or on his own, to raise support. The fact that he went to Neudingen, a place which, as we have seen, had been of particular importance to him since 870, may suggest the latter is more likely.³⁷⁷ However, we may speculate that Charles seemed so ill to Arnulf that the latter was confident his days were numbered, removing the need for him to bloody his hands or to engage in proceedings against his sick uncle which might in time come to be seen as dishonourable. The new king also had Bernard commended to him, presumably in

³⁷³ BC s.a.887, p.115. I take this to be a reference to Charles's palace staff, most of whom were Alemans and were taken over en masse by Arnulf; see Fleckenstein, *Hofkapelle*, pp.198-202.

³⁷⁴ AFC s.a.887, p.106; BC s.a.887, p.115. Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128 mentions gifts and the commendation of Bernard to Arnulf. The unspecified gifts may have included the so-called Ellwangen Casket: see Schramm, 'Bildnisse', pp.114-5 with n.19a.

³⁷⁵ Reuter, *Germany*, p.120.

³⁷⁶ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, 888, pp.128-9. AFC s.a.887, p.106 does the same, although it never refers to Arnulf directly as *rex*.

³⁷⁷ See c.6.6.4. Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128 caricatures the emperor's poverty for literary effect, the feast-giver turned into a man who cannot even feed himself.

order to neutralise his claims.³⁷⁸ His fate was sealed in 891 when he was killed leading a rebellion against Arnulf.³⁷⁹

As noted above, any attempt to reconstruct the course of events must remain tentative. The hypothesis just presented, that the deposition came about due to a confluence of Arnulf's motives (resentment at exclusion from royal power) and opportunity (a stand-off with the emperor won by a display of force, and with the nobility swayed by continuing doubts over the succession and Charles's illness), does however make sense as an outcome of the situation created by the course of royal politics since 885. The character of this situation shows how the widely-accepted 'strong aristocracy' model promoted by Schlesinger and his adherents is misconceived. The aristocracy had always played a prominent role in determining the resolution of succession struggles and the election of new kings: this was not a novelty in 887. They were only one element in the course of events bringing about the fateful *dénouement*, along with the respective agendas and priorities of Charles and Arnulf. Arnulf's succession was not necessary or inevitable. He could simply have failed, had, say, Charles done a Louis the Pious and recovered, just as the risings of Hugh of Lotharingia in 885 or Bernard in 891 could have succeeded. The cliché that history is written by the victors is rarely so obviously true as when applied to Carolingian historiography, but this is often overlooked by its modern commentators. The 'rise of the aristocracy' theory is largely based on the Bavarian annalist's account of 887, but this text was written with a propagandistic purpose in mind. It is dangerous to build on it a grand theory of a great historical process inexorably sweeping individuals and events out of their path on the way to 'feudalism', France and Germany. Similarly, Tellenbach's view of a weak Charles and strong Arnulf, although more rooted in contemporary politics, still pays too little attention to the context of events and the changing positions of the protagonists. The problem is not one of institutional relationships or of necessarily antagonistic individuals holding static positions.

³⁷⁸ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128. Similarly, Hugh of Lotharingia had been commended to Louis the German in 867, and Arnulf to Louis the Younger in 879: AB s.a.867, p.137; AF s.a.879, p.93.

³⁷⁹ AA s.a.890, 891, p.182.

Rather, the coup of 887 must be understood in light of the fluctuating relationships between particular individuals over a relatively short space of time.

Nevertheless, the revolt of 887 was indeed a significant event, due to the fact that no adult male legitimate Carolingians remained: the dynastic monopoly on royal power which had endured since 751 was shattered. It is this, rather than a shift in the nature of the 'German constitution' for which the deposition of Charles the Fat is truly notable. With royal legitimacy now up for grabs and power vacuums appearing all over the empire, the way was clear for the likes of Odo of Paris and Rudolf of Burgundy to make their claims and establish a form of kingship which was hard-won by numerous concessions to the aristocracy.³⁸⁰ The struggle between Charles and Arnulf had not, however, been fought over these issues. If the aftermath of Arnulf's coup saw the development of important changes in the shape of Frankish politics, the motivations and actions of its protagonists were not revolutionary, but entirely traditional.

³⁸⁰ See c.8.

7: CHARLES THE FAT AND NOTKER THE STAMMERER

7.1: Introduction

Notker the Stammerer's unorthodox work on Charlemagne, the *Gesta Karoli* (the title is not contemporary), stands as one of the more interesting and unusual examples of ninth-century historiography. Earlier generations of historians looked unfavourably upon its anecdotal, humorous, moralising and, by positivist standards, historically inaccurate approach, dismissing it as a laughably gauche imitation of the more stately Carolingian biographies penned by the likes of Einhard, Thegan and the Astronomer. Halphen summed up this evaluation when he declared, in a frequently-quoted phrase, that Notker's *Gesta Karoli* was as useful a source for the reign of Charlemagne as was Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* for that of Louis XIII.¹ More recent commentators have come at the *Gesta* from different angles. In particular, Ganz has shown that the very mangling of historical sources which Halphen saw as the most reprehensible aspect of the *Gesta* is in fact its central structural element. Far from being a naively-recorded collection of bizarre anecdotes he had picked up in cloistered conversations, Notker's work was actually a carefully-constructed exposition of Einhard's *Vita Karoli*, designed to invert its secular values and place God back at the centre of the reader's understanding of history.² The evident distance between Einhard and Notker was, therefore, consciously established. Ganz's favourable assessment of the value of the *Gesta* complements the researches of other scholars, most notably Siegrist, who traced the influence of Notker's monastic training and outlook on his writings, and Goetz, who read the text as a mirror reflecting manifold aspects of late ninth-century society and thought.³

However, for all that Notker has been vindicated as a major thinker and writer of the Carolingian period, his relevance to the study of contemporary politics has been disproportionately neglected. Löwe had just about the first and seemingly also last word on this subject in 1970, in a single article which looks rather isolated when placed next to the numerous works dedicated to the possible

¹ Halphen, *Études*, p.142.

² Ganz, 'Humour'; cf. now Innes, 'Memory'.

³ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*; Goetz, *Strukturen*.

political agendas of Einhard.⁴ In large part this is because, as has been repeatedly stressed in this thesis, while Notker has been rehabilitated, his age has not. Its politics are still seen as self-explanatory and stagnant in contrast to the dynamic intrigues riddling the court circle of Louis the Pious on which Einhard may well have been passing comment; even Löwe was party to these assumptions, and they govern his interpretation of the text.

Accordingly, even the basic question of why the work was written in the first place remains without a satisfactory answer, and seems, remarkably, sometimes to have been regarded as unimportant: Goetz, in the most recent major study of the *Gesta*, does not address the issue at all. The most common interpretation of Notker's compendium of idealised vignettes about Charlemagne is, not unreasonably, that they constitute a kind of *Fürstenspiegel*, one of the genre of exhortatory texts intended to guide the behaviour of rulers (in this case Charles the Fat) which pepper the literary output of the ninth century.⁵ There is much to commend this view, in as much as the *Gesta* consistently stresses some of the classic ideals of Christian kingship (justice, wisdom, prudence), as well as reinforcing the importance of primary monastic virtues such as humility and charity.⁶ In the broad sense of the term, it is indeed reasonable to class it as a mirror for princes. However, certain passages in the text, especially those which address Charles the Fat directly, invite a more specific interpretation (as indeed do certain passages in other ninth-century *specula principum*). For example, we know from one such section that Charles himself had commissioned the work:⁷ the so far unanswered question is, why? This chapter will seek to substantiate the assertion that there is more to be made of the political content of the *Gesta Karoli* than has been previously allowed. This will not entail a comprehensive reinterpretation of the whole text, but rather only of parts of it, although certain significant implications for the whole text will emerge. The conclusions offered are intended largely to complement, rather than replace, those of previous studies.

⁴ Löwe, 'Karlsbuch'.

⁵ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild* is the most comprehensive and influential exponent of this view.

⁶ Siegrist and Goetz discuss these themes throughout their books.

⁷ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.18, p.22

7.2: The date of the *Gesta Karoli*

Any assessment of the political content of a work like the *Gesta* must begin with its dates. The text is usually dated to between December 883 and November 887, but neither of the termini are entirely satisfactory.⁸ To begin at the end, the *terminus ad quem* of November 887 is drawn from the date of Charles's deposition. One factor adduced in support of this date is that the work as we have it is incomplete, lacking a promised third book and actually breaking off mid-sentence in book 2; the fall of Charles, it follows, caused Notker to abandon his commission. This hypothesis, although plausible, can be refuted. In book 2 of the *Gesta*, as part of a brief digression concerning Louis the German's virtuous character, Notker makes reference to two privileges granted by that king to the, in his view, impoverished community of St-Gall in 873.⁹ As the Stammerer pointed out, these had been granted in collaboration with the young Charles the Fat himself, and were clear evidence that Louis was a 'Dei cultor eximius, servorum Christi socius, tutor et defensor indefessus.' Notker's aim was, clearly, to exhort Charles to issue imperial confirmations of these charters, which served to place St-Gall on an equal footing with its near neighbour Reichenau.¹⁰ His point was all the more obvious in that he himself had been instrumental in drafting and cataloguing the original documents, and he echoed their wording in the *Gesta*.¹¹ Charles did ultimately satisfy Notker's wishes on 30 May 887.¹² That his charter of this date had not yet been issued when the *Gesta Karoli* was written supplies us with a new *terminus ad quem* for the work.¹³

The 883 date, on the other hand, is taken from reports in the St-Gall house histories by Ratpert and Ekkehard IV, which reveal that Charles met and talked

⁸ For instance, Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', pp.123, 136; Penndorf, *Problem*, pp.150-1; Eggert, 'Reichsgedanken', p.74. See Haefele's introduction, pp. xxiii-xliv, on the manuscript traditions.

⁹ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.10, pp.66-7; DD LG 145-6.

¹⁰ As hinted at in the *Gesta*: St-Gall enjoyed 'nullum privilegium aliorum monasteriorum.'

¹¹ Haefele, 'Studien', pp.385-9. The reference here to arms and marriage in same chapter may also be intended to call 873 to Charles's mind: see below, c.7.5.

¹² D CIII 159. The date was significant as a day of commemoration at St-Gall: Innes, 'Memory', pp.20-1.

¹³ I therefore reject the argument of Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.135, who acknowledged the significance of this chapter in relation to the 887 charter, but claimed that Notker pretended it had not yet been issued to maintain the fiction that he was writing in December 883: why Notker would have wanted to do this is neither obvious nor explained.

with Notker during a three-day visit to the monastery.¹⁴ That this meeting took place is not in doubt, yet there is no compelling reason to ascribe, as historians have tended to do, Charles's commissioning of the *Gesta* to this particular occasion. Charles's presence in the precincts of the monastery at this time receives special prominence in the house chronicles due to the fact that while he was there a change of abbots was effected with imperial confirmation, and ever since then there has been a tendency for historians to attach significant events to the visit.¹⁵ In any case, we do not lack for other evidence for very close relations between Charles the Fat and St-Gall. We have already seen that he was probably present there every year during the annual festival of St. Otmar until 879, after which he was represented by legates.¹⁶ We also know that Charles was a keen borrower of books from the monastic library, as were his queen Richgard and his archchancellor Liutward, all at a time when Notker was librarian: it was the Stammerer himself who entered the details of their withdrawals into the library catalogue.¹⁷ Liutward was also the dedicatee of another of Notker's works, the *Liber Ymorum* of 884.¹⁸ There is every reason, then, to suppose that Charles and other members of his entourage met and had dealings with Notker on other occasions, both before and after late 883.¹⁹ In any case, we need not assume that he commissioned the *Gesta* in person, let alone during his famous visit.²⁰ Therefore, although a reference in the text to the retirement of Abbot Hartmut means we must indeed date it *after* December 883, nothing forces us to date it *in* December 883.²¹

¹⁴ Ratpert, *De Casibus*, col.1077-80; Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.9, p.32, c.38, p.86.

¹⁵ Schmid, 'Brüderschaften', pp.176-7.

¹⁶ See above, c.6.6.4.

¹⁷ Lehmann, *Bibliothekskataloge*, pp.72-3, 77, 88. Duft, 'Katalogisierung', pp.12-3; Rankin, 'Ego', pp.292-5.

¹⁸ Notker, *Liber Ymorum*, p.8; von den Steinen, *Darstellungsband*, pp.504-7.

¹⁹ He was also at St-Gall in the years before becoming king, as shown by existence of at least one reception poem written for him, perhaps by Notker himself: Bulst, '*Susceptacula*', pp.135-8. His dealings with and one visit to the monastery in this period were also referred to in the *Gesta*, 1.34, p.47; 2.10, pp.66-7.

²⁰ Only Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, p.9 entertains the possibility of an epistolary commission.

²¹ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.10, pp.66-7. The conversation could, for the sake of argument, have been about church song, a subject in which both men were interested: Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.46, p.104. It may be no coincidence that the *Liber Ymorum* was prepared and sent to court only months later. Ekkehard's wording at c.38, p.86 does not sound like a literary commission: Notker 'Karolo multa querenti pridie quesita resolveret'.

Certain sections of the work appear, moreover, to include references to contemporary events which can help us to pare down this dating frame still further. Firstly, in his discussion of the palace of Aachen, Notker proffers his monastic seclusion as an excuse for not being able to give a physical description of the actual structures, saying that he would leave this task to Charles's 'cancellarii'.²² This is the only time this word appears in the work to describe imperial representatives, who nonetheless figure frequently under different terms like 'fideles' and 'primores'.²³ Notker, who was himself a redactor of charters at St-Gall, probably therefore used the term 'cancellarii' in its specific sense, to denote members of the royal chancery. Only one charter was issued by Charles the Fat for the royal chapel at Aachen, in the final months of 884.²⁴ Charles was in Regensburg at the time, and indeed seems, as Notker implied, never to have visited Aachen. Some of his *cancellarii* must therefore either have visited the palace or talked to chapel representatives in 884 to gain the detailed knowledge with which to compose the ensuing document: it was probably this to which Notker was referring in his comment on the description of the palace buildings.

Secondly, Notker's account of the raids of the Viking leader Godafrið I (d.810) displays an interesting anomaly. Although he knew from his readings of Einhard and the *Annales Regni Francorum* that this *dux*'s activities had been focused on Frisia, Saxony and the lands of the Abodrites, Notker places him instead in the Moselle region.²⁵ This shift strongly suggests that the Stammerer had merged Godafrið I with Godafrið III, who was active in the Moselle just before his death in mid-885.²⁶ Thirdly, Haefele, following a suggestion of Sabbe, has pointed out that Notker's description of the destruction of the bridge at Mainz in 813, incorporates details which suggest an elision with the fire in the same city in early 886.²⁷

²² Notker, *Gesta*, 1.30, p.41.

²³ See Haefele's wordlist for examples.

²⁴ D CIII 109.

²⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.13, pp.75-6. See also below, c.7.4.

²⁶ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, p.123. Haefele's introduction, p.xv.

²⁷ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.30, pp.40-1; cf. AFC s.a.886, p.104; Haefele's introduction, pp.xv-xvi.

We know that book 2 of the *Gesta* was begun on a 30 May.²⁸ Since the Mainz fire, which Notker refers to at the end of book 1, occurred in March 886, it is likely that book 1 was completed in March, April or May of that same year. From all this evidence we may conclude that Notker started book 1 no earlier than late 884 (the Aachen charter allusion) and finished it around May 886, and went on to finish book 2 as far as we have it before the end of May 887 (the issuing of the imperial confirmation of St-Gall's privileges). Assuming that he did not stop working on the text for any prolonged period of time (and this was, after all, an imperial commission) it is likely that he began writing closer to the end than to the beginning of the year 885. This hypothetical dating of c.late 885-late 886/early 887 for the *Gesta Karoli* is circumstantially supported by another of Notker's works, the *Notatio*. This text, which is an annotated bibliography of texts appropriate for a bishop to know, complements one of the fundamental themes of the *Gesta*, namely the exposition, based on the Book of Daniel, of the Carolingian empire as a new world empire.²⁹ It is reasonable to suppose that Notker composed these works in tandem, so it is significant that the *Notatio* is dated to 885.³⁰

The issue of *when* a text was composed is obviously very closely related to that of *why* it was written. With the *Gesta Karoli* we are at a disadvantage because of the loss of the preface to book 1, which might well have answered the relevant questions.³¹ The following discussion attempts to identify an implicit political agenda in the work which, although masked by Notker's circumspect approach, would nevertheless have been clear to a contemporary audience. This agenda, it will be argued, makes most sense as a commentary on some of the important events of late 885 and 886, and hence supports the evidence for these dates as marking the period of the *Gesta*'s composition.

²⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.pref., p.48.

²⁹ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.133-8 shows the interdependence of the two works.

³⁰ Von den Steinen, *Darstellungsband*, p.494.

³¹ The existence of a preface is mentioned in Notker, *Gesta*, 2.pref., p.48.

7.3: Notker's bishops

Book 1 of the *Gesta Karoli* is concerned, in its author's own words, 'de religiositate et ecclesiastica domni Karoli cura.'³² A brief synopsis of its contents and themes is in order here. Chapters 1-10 are linked together by the broad theme of education and learning, first discussing its Carolingian foundations with Alcuin and the Irish (cc.1-2), then schools (c.3), the worthiness of episcopal candidates (cc.4-7), and Charlemagne's insistence on strict standards of learning from his clergy (cc.8-10). The next group of chapters, 11-25, contains the most memorable theme of the book, with colourful anecdotes about Charlemagne's dealings with both unworthy and virtuous bishops. Chapter 26 is the imperial coronation of 800, while the stories in cc.27-33 describe the building projects at Aachen and some of the events which took place within its walls. Finally, chapter 34 concerns the emperor's battle dress, in preparation for book 2's projected discussion of military matters.

The stories work on a variety of levels. Most of them have individual didactic points to make, the most frequently recurring of which are the humbling of the proud and the rewarding of the humble.³³ Kingly virtues such as constant vigilance and the inspiration of fear are consistently stressed.³⁴ Stepping back and taking a broader view, however, implicit messages can also be read into Notker's overall structure. For example, the decision to begin his work with Charlemagne's ecclesiastical care contrasts sharply with Einhard's opening discussion of the secular rise of the Carolingians and reinforces Notker's prioritising of the sacred in history.³⁵ Book 1 can also be read as a schematisation of the Carolingians' achievement of their world empire, a progression from their acquisition of God's favour and learning, the way this was incorporated into their church, and finally the assumption of empire by Charlemagne.³⁶ The extent of Notker's artifice cannot be doubted: this was an extremely carefully structured

³² Ibid.

³³ See esp. Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.55-70. This is recorded by Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.38, pp.86-8 as one of Notker's main personal concerns.

³⁴ See Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.71-108; Goetz, *Strukturen*, pp.98-113.

³⁵ This is the argument of Ganz, 'Humour'.

³⁶ Haefele's introduction, pp.xvii-xxi; Berschin, *Biographie*, pp.390-4.

work full of forceful points at first sight concealed but working on a number of different levels.

Our best direct clue to the reason for the involvement of Charles the Fat in the whole procedure comes in a remarkably overlooked group of chapters at the heart of book 1. Chapters 16-19 all concern the same bishop, who thus features more prominently in the work than any other protagonist outside the royal family. He was one of Notker's bad bishops, a man of great pride who constantly overreached his position and had to be repeatedly chastised and humbled by Charlemagne. The bishop is described as holding 'prima Germaniae sedes', an unambiguous reference to Mainz.³⁷ It was very unusual for Notker to come this close to naming an actual bishop in his work; most of his stories give the impression of being purely typological and didactic, and indeed on another occasion he stated explicitly that he preferred not to identify his subjects.³⁸ This bishop (who, more correctly, would have been an archbishop) of Mainz was clearly a special case.³⁹ Notker goes on immediately after naming the man's see to sound a note of caution: 'Nimium pertimesco, o domine imperator Karole, ne, dum iussionem vestram implere cupio, omnium professionum et maxime summorum sacerdotum offensionem incurram. Sed tamen de his omnibus non grandis mihi cura est, si tantum vestra defensione non destituar.'⁴⁰ The conjunction of Notker's expression of fear and his extended criticism of the bishop of Mainz lead to the conclusion that these negative stories were intended to have a more contemporary resonance than the focus on Charlemagne seems to suggest: if this was merely an abstract mirror for princes, why would he be worried? The bishop who was so severely criticised in these chapters was surely supposed to be identified with a living figure, Archbishop Liutbert of Mainz, the most important churchman in east Francia from the 860s until the 880s.⁴¹

³⁷ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.17, p.22.

³⁸ Ibid, 1.25, p.33.

³⁹ The terms were sometimes interchanged: Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128 referred to Liutbert of Mainz as 'episcopus'.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 1.18, p.22.

⁴¹ Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', pp.140-2 entertained this possibility before eventually identifying the bishop with Liutward of Vercelli, a conclusion which was based on his prior assumption that the latter and the empress were engaged in an anti-imperial conspiracy.

It is also evident from Notker's wording that this implicit criticism of Liutbert was incorporated into the text on the orders of Charles the Fat: why would Charles have done this? Liutbert had been a potential thorn in the imperial side ever since 882, when Charles had succeeded Louis the Younger and thereby deprived the archbishop of his long-cherished position as archchaplain and main court adviser. The Mainz continuation of the *Annales Fuldenses* stands testament to the resentment the jilted Liutbert felt towards Charles and his preferred archchaplain, Liutward of Vercelli. Nevertheless, the offending text does not seem to have become known at court, and the rivalry was not fought out in public. Liutbert's continued high standing (he was, after all, in control of 'prima Germaniae sedes') is reflected by his appearance as petitioner in royal charters before 885.⁴² He also led a successful campaign against the Vikings in the Hesbaye in early 885 in the company of the emperor's leading commander Henry, hence presumably with imperial sanction.⁴³ Open criticism of Liutbert would not have been in Charles's interest up to this point: he may not even have been aware of the extent of the archbishop's resentment towards him.

However, the cordial relations between the two did break down in late 885 over the main political issue of the day, the proposed legitimization of Bernard as the emperor's heir. As we have seen, Charles enlisted the pope to his cause, planning presumably to get him to sanction the annulment of his marriage to the Empress Richgard and clear the way for a blessing of his union with Bernard's mother, a concubine whose identity is now unknown. The Mainz annalist added that Charles 'voluit enim, ut fama vulgabat, quosdam episcopos inrationabiliter deponere' in order to smooth the passage of the Bernard plan.⁴⁴ The bishops' support for the scheme would have been almost as important as the pope's, as the case of Lothar II had shown, and domestic episcopal opposition would have been a difficult hurdle for Charles to overcome. That our only evidence for such opposition comes in the Mainz annals is very significant: this text served as the mouthpiece of Liutbert himself, expressing his personal views even when they had

⁴² D CIII 109. See also DD 64-5.

⁴³ AFC s.a.885, p.102; cf. 883, p.100.

⁴⁴ AFC s.a.885, p.103. See above, c.6.2.

diverged from the official line of his master Louis the German.⁴⁵ We may therefore take it that Liutbert was opposed to the legitimation of Bernard, one potential outcome of which would have been the perpetuation of the primacy of Alemannia in the political geography of the east Frankish kingdom, the very situation which had caused him to lose his court job in the first place.⁴⁶ If Charles was thinking of trying to depose his opponents (Liutbert and his nameless associates) or impose other papally-enforced ecclesiastical sanctions on them, then he must have become aware of the archbishop's opinions: his opposition must have been public. In addition, this was perhaps the first event of Charles's reign where Liutbert's dormant opposition could be brought into the open and justified with legitimate ecclesiastical arguments: the precedent of Lothar II was still fresh in the mind. In the event, the pope's unexpected demise made the whole affair a dead letter, and relations between emperor and archbishop reverted to the uneasy cold war situation which had obtained during the preceding years. In late 885, however, in anticipation of, or in the wake of, Liutbert's defiance, Charles had a motive to want to see the archbishop criticised. Notker also had reason to fear Liutbert in particular: Mainz was the metropolitan with jurisdiction over St-Gall, and the Stammerer had already had cautious dealings with him.⁴⁷

My hypothesis, then, is that Charles the Fat asked Notker to incorporate into the *Gesta Karoli* a thinly-veiled criticism of the behaviour of Archbishop Liutbert in the wake of his opposition to the Bernard plan in late 885, a commission only carried out by the monk with reluctance and the promise of the emperor's protection. A survey of the criticisms levelled against the offending prelate in the *Gesta* supports this reading. Pride is the sin which dominates the image of the bishop of Mainz in Notker's work. He cuts a ludicrous figure in chapter 16. Charlemagne, having observed that he was 'episcopus vanae gloriae et inanium rerum valde cupidus' sets a trap for him, persuading a Jewish merchant to stuff and spice a dead mouse and sell it to him as an exotic luxury. The acquisitive churchman naturally falls for this cunning subterfuge and is exposed by the emperor at an assembly in terms which draw the moral of the story.

⁴⁵ See above, c.2.2.

⁴⁶ Reuter, *Annals*, p.99, n.7 also infers this from the Mainz annals.

Bishops today, says Charles, are too covetous and prone to indulgence in luxuries, behaviour which is 'in contrarium cuncta' to the charitable pastoral work which they should be doing with the poor instead. The lesson is, it should be noted, couched in the language of ideal and appropriate behaviour.⁴⁸

The kingly aspirations of the man are the subject of the subsequent chapter. In it, while Charlemagne was engaged elsewhere with war against the Avars, the bishop tried to get the empress to let him borrow the imperial sceptre to use in church processions. The empress stalled him and shared a laugh over the matter with her husband when he returned, before Charlemagne again upbraided the man in public, before an assembly of 'cuncta pene Europa'. This time the contrast between ideal and reality was couched in terms of ambition: where unworldliness was the proper stock of a bishop, this one had tried to seize the sceptre, which 'pro significatione regiminis nostri ferre solemus.'⁴⁹ As before, the bishop begged forgiveness and left in humiliation.⁵⁰

Chapter 18 continues the theme of inappropriate royal pretensions at length. Charlemagne decrees that all bishops must deliver a sermon in person in their cathedrals before a set date, on pain of dismissal. This of course greatly worries our episcopal anti-hero, terrified of losing his office and the high living that goes along with it. Forced to mount the pulpit (to the amazement of his congregation, unused to such an event) in the presence of two royal legates, an absurd scene develops in which the incompetent bishop preaches a mighty and lofty sermon against a poor man who has entered the church with a boot on his head, due to his embarrassment at being ginger-haired. This dubious triumph accomplished, he then proceeds to wine and dine the royal legates with great lavishness. With every luxury at his disposal and surrounded by troops of military retainers, 'ita ut nihil illi nisi sceptrum illud et nomen regium deesset.' 'Qualis numquam cena magno composita est Karolo.' Finally, worried about the impression he had given the legates, he bribed them with 'regiis muneribus.'

⁴⁷ *Collectio Sangallensis*, no.43.

⁴⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.16, pp.19-21.

⁴⁹ The transfer of such regalia could signify the transfer of actual authority in Carolingian politics: see now Airle, 'Narratives'.

Unable to lie, they told everything to the emperor, who magnanimously let the bishop off after deciding he had acted ultimately through fear of him, as was proper.⁵¹

Finally, chapter 19 underlines the bishop's stupidity and arrogance. Charlemagne strikes him to the ground after he rather tactlessly opines that a chorister relative of the emperor sings the Alleluja like a country bumpkin ploughing the fields.⁵²

Certainly, the points made by Notker about correct episcopal behaviour in these four stories can be read as expressions of timeless Christian ideals. Nonetheless, the fact that they all concern the same bishop should encourage the reader to look for common threads linking the various criticisms. One such theme is the way in which the criticisms are couched in terms of failed ideals. Each time he exhibits an aspect of his sinful nature, the moral is explicitly drawn in terms of how he ought to have behaved: he was worldly and ambitious, for example, where a bishop should have been a humble servant of the poor. This establishment of ideal types was a staple rhetorical strategy for authors wishing to express criticism in the early middle ages: we have already seen it at work, for instance, in the Mainz continuation of the *Annales Fuldenses*. Notker, moreover, had also expressed firm views on correct episcopal behaviour in his guidebook for Salomon of Constance, the *Notatio*. In some ways, indeed, these four chapters form the centrepiece of everything Notker wrote about bishops. In this bishop's galaxy of sins, notably arrogance, vainglory, worldliness, ambition and stupidity, we find a compendium of everything which the Stammerer found reprehensible in episcopal behaviour. Where previous chapters focused on individual bishops epitomising individual virtues or sins, the bishop of Mainz had a comprehensive set of faults. Whereas the earlier chapters established typologies of right and wrong in Notker's evaluation of the demeanour of prelates in general, in chapters 16-19 he presented an example of a man who personified all the problems he had

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1.17, pp.21-2. See also above, c.6.6.5, where I interpret the role of the queen here as an allegorical reference to Richgard. Notker's choice of Hildegard as the wife of Charlemagne to figure in his work was in part due to his personal connections: Innes, 'Memory', pp.24-5.

⁵¹ Ibid, 1.18, pp.22-5.

⁵² Ibid, 1.19, p.25. See Haefele, 'Studien', pp.381-5 for an exposition of this story's Allelujah motif.

been discussing. The bishop of Mainz was the climax of the story, the punchline of the joke. This structuring is even made explicit by Notker. Chapters 14 and 15 are positive examples of humble and obedient bishops who are rewarded by Charlemagne with estates. The Stammerer makes clear the contrast between these men and the bishop of Mainz at the beginning of chapter 16: ‘Quia retulimus quomodo sapientissimus Karolus humiles exaltaverit, referamus etiam, qualiter superbos humiliaverit.’⁵³ Their virtuous behaviour serves to throw the actions of the bishop of Mainz into sharper focus. As Siegrist showed, a form of pride designated by the term ‘cenodoxia’ (literally ‘emptiness of doctrine’) was for Notker the ultimate sin.⁵⁴ His paragons were humble and obedient, the bishop of Mainz was precisely the opposite. He was, as Charlemagne observed, unworthy of the rank of bishop.⁵⁵

This man is, then, revealed by the context of the stories about him in Notker’s typology as an anti-ideal, an anti-bishop. Siegrist, in his exposition of the idea of ‘cenodoxia’ in the *Gesta*, attributed Notker’s obsession with this vice to his monastic training and outlook.⁵⁶ However this may be, we should also note that there is a distinct theme in Notker’s discussion which may also be related to the state of contemporary politics, namely that concerning the need for bishops to be obedient to the king. This is why the good bishops of chapters 14 and 15 are rewarded: their obedience is unquestioning and even causes them distress, but, nevertheless, they obey Charlemagne. In contrast, the bishop of chapters 16-19 deliberately disregards and tries to deceive the royal will. His attempts to go a stage further and actually behave like a king, or even usurp royal powers, are stressed repeatedly by Notker in chapter 17 and 18, as we saw above. This behaviour corresponds neatly to Liutbert of Mainz’s opposition to royal policy in late 885. In particular his attempt to usurp Charlemagne’s sceptre, which Notker understands as standing ‘pro significatione regiminis nostri’ can be read as a fairly direct reference to Liutbert’s defiance.

⁵³ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.16, p.19.

⁵⁴ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.55-70.

⁵⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.18, p.25.

⁵⁶ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.55-70.

Conversely, the king's right to appoint and depose bishops, one of the issues of contention in 885, is stridently asserted in the *Gesta Karoli*.⁵⁷ The right to appoint is most clearly expressed in chapter 4, where Charlemagne makes two wise choices of bishop in the face of disapproval and opposition from a variety of sources. The king's decision is seen as the manifestation of divine will, and his authority over appointments is described to him by one of the protagonists as 'potestam a Deo tibi collatem.'⁵⁸ Chapter 5 goes even further, ascribing to the ruler the ability to depose bishops as well. Removing an incumbent who had been seduced by the worldly accoutrements of his position, Charlemagne explains his actions thus: 'superbus ille, qui nec Deum nec praecipuum illius amicum [the king] timuit vel honoravit...divino et meo iudicio careat episcopatu.'⁵⁹ Where the haughty bishop wanted to act like a king, Charlemagne, 'episcopus episcoporum',⁶⁰ was able to effortlessly exhibit episcopal qualities.⁶¹ The power to appoint and depose was, therefore, the king's by divine approval, while the obligation of obedience fell upon the bishop. The obedience of the episcopate and the potential need to depose some of their number were, as we have seen, issues of great relevance to Charles the Fat as he tried to implement his plan to legitimise Bernard. Notker was telling Charles just what he would have wanted to hear in the autumn of 885, sanctioning his own attempts to assert his authority over the situation by anchoring them to the divinely-approved powers enjoyed by his illustrious ancestor Charlemagne.

Notker's portrait of the 'bishop' of Mainz also makes sense in the context of the debate over church hierarchy which was building up in east Francia at precisely this time. The collection of canons known to historians as Pseudo-Isidore found one of its earliest east Frankish outlets in Mainz in the 880s, where Archbishop Liutbert was well aware of its content.⁶² Pseudo-Isidore's insistence on the emancipation of prelates from secular power, especially their immunity from lay accusation and punishment, would have bolstered the opposition of

⁵⁷ See Goetz, *Strukturen*, pp.45-51.

⁵⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.4, p.6.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 1.5, p.9.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 1.25, p.33.

⁶¹ Ibid, 1.11, p.16.

⁶² John, *Collectio*, pp.120-1; Fuhrmann, *Einfluß*, pp.225-6; Carroll, 'Archbishops', pp.111-2.

Liutbert to Charles in 885, and also provides a firm context for the Mainz annalist's fury at the emperor's attempt to remove his episcopal opponents.⁶³ The text was also known at St-Gall, where an abbreviated but essentially similar version (Pseudo-Remedius) was produced in the early 880s.⁶⁴ If, as seems certain given his prominence in the monastery's intellectual activity, Notker was familiar with the collection, then the *Gesta* can also be interpreted as a response to its claims. Notker's attempts to provide a justification for lay (royal) interference in episcopal appointments are no more extreme or one-sided than Pseudo-Isidore/Remedius's attempts to put the opposite case. The consistency and savagery of the *Gesta*'s attack on bishops' independence was, in other words, appropriate to the stridency of the counter-assertions which some prelates were coming to express at this time. It was appropriate also that a refutation of Pseudo-Isidorean ideas, which were legitimised historically by reference to a series of allegedly authentic papal letters, should be founded on the idealisation of an antithetical historical lay figure (i.e. Charlemagne). More specifically, in the *Gesta*'s attribution of episcopal and even God-like qualities to Charlemagne, 'episcopus episcoporum', we might read an attempt to shortcircuit the legal collections' claims for bishops' immunity from lay authority.⁶⁵ Notker's insistence on the traditional biblical sin of pride as the ultimate vice also provides an antidote to the Pseudo-Remedian claim that this distinction belonged to *sacrilegium*, in the form of usurping the church hierarchy by infringing episcopal independence.⁶⁶

The discussion of bishops which dominates book 1 of the *Gesta Karoli* from chapter 4 to chapter 20 thus climaxes with the implicit criticism of Liutbert of Mainz incorporated into chapters 16-19.⁶⁷ This was much more than simply

⁶³ For a summary of Pseudo-Isidore's themes, see John, *Collectio*, pp.24-6.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp.119-24 ascertains the date and place.

⁶⁵ See for example chapters 4, 18 and 19 of Pseudo-Remedius which concern obedience to bishops and a forbidding of their removal; ibid, pp.140, 146-7.

⁶⁶ Ibid, c.34, p.155. We do not know if these canon law collections were known at court, but Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.46, p.102 does tell us that Liutward of Vercelli had 'epistolas canonicas Grecas' which he gave to St-Gall. The good relationship between Liutward and St-Gall may also have informed Notker's criticism of Liutbert.

⁶⁷ Chapter 20 (Notker, *Gesta*, pp.26-7) concerns the criticism of a certain bishop called Recho, the only other named bishop in the work. His significance is not clear: perhaps he was meant to represent one of Liutbert's allies. This ends Notker's main discussion of bishops. Chapters 21-26,

monastic gossip.⁶⁸ The traits elliptically attributed to him in these stories are not supposed to provide an accurate description of his character. Rather, they make sense as the exposition of a typological scheme: Liutbert is unworthy of his position in every way, and the absolute wrongness of his opposition to the *verbum regis* in the designation of Bernard is shown. More than this, however, the bishop of Mainz cuts a ridiculous figure in these four chapters, clearly intended to be laughed at. His behaviour is not merely sinful or inappropriate, but indeed completely risible. The purchase of the stuffed mouse, the misdirected 'sermon' against the red-haired man wearing a boot on his head and his attempt at a humorous put-down of the young chorister are all ludicrous, and deliberately portrayed as such. The most laughable action of all is his attempt to usurp the symbols of royalty and to defy the king: Charlemagne and Hildegard themselves find it 'highly amusing' when the bishop tries to lay his hands on the royal sceptre.⁶⁹ Ganz has shown how Notker used humour as one of the *Gesta*'s central rhetorical devices, designed to help make clear the points contained in his multi-layered anecdotes. If the audience got the joke and smiled 'the smile of understanding', they showed their comprehension of the author's purpose.⁷⁰ In chapters 16-19 of book 1, the joke was on Archbishop Liutbert of Mainz.

7.4: Contemporary references in the *Gesta Karoli*

Notker's text worked, therefore, on a multiplicity of levels. As well as embedding didactic messages in his anecdotes, he also historicised current events in order to please the most important member of his audience, namely the emperor. The resonances of the section on the bishop of Mainz would not have been missed by a contemporary reader at court conversant with the high political situation of the day. Just as obvious to this audience as the satirising of Liutbert, moreover, would have been the corresponding elision of Charlemagne and Charles the Fat. If Liutbert was equated with the archetypally-bad bishop of Mainz, then

although ostensibly continuing with the same theme, are presented as a digression by the author. Closer examination of these stories reveals that they are more abstract than those preceding, and that they are also distinguished by their principal concern with the actions of the devil in the world and not with the emperor, who does not feature.

⁶⁸ Innes, 'Memory', p.19.

⁶⁹ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.17, p.21.

the king who had bested and humiliated him in those four stories must have been intended, at one level, to be identified with the current ruler. This was, needless to say, a high compliment to pay to Charles the Fat. Several more references to contemporary people and events can be identified in the *Gesta*, some of which continue to flatter the emperor, while others reveal a nervy and fearful Notker, full of concern about the Viking threat and Charles's inability to settle his succession definitively.

Some of these references have already been mentioned in the context of dating the text as a whole. One of them, the story of the invasion of Godafrið I/III in 810/885 is here worth examining in more detail. Notker's version is that Northmen invaded the empire while Charlemagne was away campaigning against the Avars. Receiving a surrender, the emperor returned immediately to invade the Vikings' homeland. However, a cattle disease crippled the army and forced its retreat, perhaps, thought Notker, a sign of God's displeasure at the sins of the Franks. Later, when the emperor was again absent somewhere in the empire, Godafrið invaded and settled the Moselle region. He was then killed by his own son, incensed by his mother's recent repudiation, causing his army to lose courage and depart. Charlemagne's victory was thus accomplished without the use of force and was hence a sign of God's favour, although the bellicose emperor did express some regret that he had not had the opportunity to shed any Danish blood.⁷¹ Almost all of these details correspond to what Notker had read in Einhard and the *Annales Regni Francorum*. However, as we mentioned earlier, the historical Godafrið I invaded Frisia, not the Moselle region.⁷² The latter had, on the other hand, been the target of the Viking leader Godafrið III in 885 when he launched a raid on centres around the Rhine-Moselle confluence.⁷³ Notker's 'error' was deliberate: he intended his audience to identify the figure of Godafrið I with that of Godafrið III.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ganz, 'Humour', pp.181-3.

⁷¹ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.13, pp.75-6.

⁷² ARF s.a.810, p.131; Einhard, *Vita*, c.14, p.77. Saxony and Frisia had always been the focus of Godafrið's ambitions: cf. ARF s.a.804, pp.118-9; 808, pp.125-6; 809, pp.128-9.

⁷³ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, p.123 identifies Coblenz, Andernach and Sinzig as Godafrið's principal targets.

⁷⁴ Haefele accepted this elision in his introduction, p.xv, but thought it was unconscious on Notker's part.

If the two Godafrids were elided by Notker in this chapter, the parallels between the two Charleses were also clear. In 885 Charles the Fat, like Charlemagne in 810, had been absent within the empire when the invaders struck, ordering affairs in his newly-acquired western kingdom. Another parallel with 810 was that again the emperor prevailed without having to intervene personally: the *dux* Henry tricked Godafrid into a meeting and slaughtered him and his retainers.⁷⁵ Notker's historical inexactitude was, therefore, a symptom neither of incompetence nor of an unquestioning adherence to his sources, oral or written: rather, it was intended to draw the reader's attention to the parallels between the effortless imperial victories of 810 and 885.⁷⁶ The Stammerer, moreover, went beyond the laconic reports of the *Annales Regni Francorum* and Einhard in his version of Godafrid's demise by reading into it an expression of divine will.⁷⁷ The chapter has an internal balance. The attempt of Charlemagne to invade the homelands of the Northmen fails, a sign of God's disfavour; but this failure is counterpointed by the effortless death of Godafrid, for which Charlemagne acknowledges God's beneficence. The implied comparison, which would have been obvious to a contemporary reader, is a flattering one for the current emperor: while the sins of the Franks had initially obstructed the success of Charlemagne, God was unambiguously on the side of Charles the Fat in his easy triumph of 885. Given that Notker was writing for Charles, his expression of this sentiment is not particularly surprising. It echoes the comparison he had expounded more explicitly in the *Continuatio*, another text presumably designed for imperial ears, in 881: 'Clementissimus Carolus [the Fat] magnum imperatorem at avuum suum, Carolum, omni sapientia et industria et bellorum successibus coequans, tranquillitate vero pacis et rerum prosperitate superans.'⁷⁸ The *Gesta Karoli*'s account of Godafrid's invasion thus includes an exposition of this idea, that

⁷⁵ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.885, pp.123-4.

⁷⁶ A similar elision was incorporated into AF s.a.881, p.97, where the Vikings' using Aachen as a stable may have been intended as an exposition of the promise of Godafrid I to sack the palace: Einhard, *Vita*, c.14, p.77.

⁷⁷ This is in keeping with Notker's view of sacred history and his Christian recasting of Einhard as identified by Ganz, 'Humour'.

⁷⁸ Notker, *Continuatio*, pp.329-30.

Charles the Fat was more successful than Charlemagne in achieving peaceful victories.⁷⁹

It is clear, therefore, that one of Notker's historical devices in the *Gesta* was to elide present and past in order to make comments on the course of current events. However, not all of these contemporary references were, like the discussion of Godafrid, intended to purely flatter the emperor. Often the author allowed his own personal interests to take centre stage, most notably in his frequent discussions of and assertions about liturgical chanting and church singing, subjects close to his heart.⁸⁰ As was mentioned earlier, he also used the *Gesta* to try to persuade Charles the Fat to confer favours on his monastery: chapter 10 of book 2 contains a clear attempt to persuade the emperor to reissue the privileges his father had conferred on St-Gall in 873.⁸¹ This form of exhortation on specific contemporary issues, rather than on universal ideals of Christian kingship, also underlies the story in book 1 chapter 13.⁸² Here Notker claims to be describing the extraordinary prudence of Charlemagne in not granting more than one county to any individual (other than frontier counts), nor any royal church or abbey to any bishop (except in unusual circumstances). As far as we know Charlemagne followed no such policy of *honor* distribution, and so it seems certain that Notker made these remarks because they were of particular concern to the community of St-Gall in the later ninth century. The holding of multiple counties by single counts was, as we discussed in chapter 6.6.4, characteristic of the distribution of power in Alemannia under Louis the German and Charles the Fat, who sought by this measure to streamline their authority. St-Gall itself benefited from the accompanying policy of strengthening selected religious institutions in the area, but the focusing of comital power was also a potential threat to its autonomy.⁸³ The most spectacular outbreak of the resulting tension occurred a few years later after Conrad I, following the example set by Charles the Fat, gave property at Stammheim to the monastery, much to the annoyance of the

⁷⁹ The virtue of bloodless success in war and politics is extolled by Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.887, p.128, 888, p.129 (in reference to Charles the Fat's family politics); and Notker, *Gesta*, 2.17, pp.81, 85 (Charlemagne's defeat of the Lombards).

⁸⁰ Eg. Notker, *Gesta*, 1.10, pp.12-5.

⁸¹ See above, c.7.2.

⁸² Notker, *Gesta*, 1.13, p.17.

counts Erchangar and Bertold, who had built a fortress on the estate.⁸⁴ Likewise, St-Gall was one of the royal abbeys which ended up in episcopal hands at various points in its history, at times coming under the influence or even direct control of the bishop of Constance. In this chapter, therefore, Notker probably hoped to draw Charles's attention to the episcopal and comital threats to St-Gall's independence at a time when he had as yet refrained from confirming its claim to the same extensive freedoms and privileges as Reichenau. It stands as an optimistic attempt to get the emperor to reverse his policies by offering him the incentive of thus emulating Charlemagne, and therefore provides a classic example of an early medieval ecclesiastical author turning a specific complaint into a general rule in order to address a ruler.

Interestingly, however, Notker makes an exception of one man, count Udalrich. He cites 'special reasons' for Charlemagne's decision to allow Udalrich to be the only multiple-county holder in his empire, but does not spell out what they were.⁸⁵ It is surely no coincidence, therefore, that the most prominent controller of multiple counties in Notker's own day was also called Udalrich. This Udalrich, known to historians as Udalrich IV, was a descendant of the count of the same name from Charlemagne's reign, and could boast among his *honores* the Linz-, Argen-, Rhein- and Alpkaus, which made him one of the most important royal representatives in the Lake Constance area.⁸⁶ He had authority in regions where St-Gall had lands, and he had the emperor's ear. He was clearly not a man to be trifled with, and may indeed have been a political ally of Abbot Bernard of St-Gall.⁸⁷ The mention of Udalrich as the exception to the ideals Notker proposed here was thus surely intended to have a contemporary resonance, one which was expedient given the circumstances of St-Gall at the time. He was trying to avoid giving offence to the current count Udalrich, expressing approval at his preeminence. Once again we can see that Notker expected his audience to see themselves in the *Gesta Karoli*; and we also appreciate that he envisaged a wider

⁸³ Borgolte, *Geschichte*, pp.187-208.

⁸⁴ Ekkehard, *Casus*, c.16, pp.42-4; see Schmid, 'Brüderschaften', pp.179-81.

⁸⁵ He mentions that Udalrich was Queen Hildegard's brother, but does not equate this with the 'special reasons'. Udalrich IV was a 'nepos' of Charles the Fat: D LG 124, D CIII 57.

⁸⁶ See Borgolte, *Grafen*, pp.255-66; and above, c.6.6.4.

audience than simply the emperor alone, one which included court figures like Udalrich.

This audience would also have been able to derive contemporary significance in Notker's story about Charlemagne's hunting injury in book 2 chapter 8.⁸⁸ A certain Isembard killed a beast which had hurt the emperor's leg, bringing its heart back as a trophy for Charlemagne. He had formerly been 'odibilis et cunctis honoribus exspoliatus', and his actions restored his good reputation. As a reward for his actions he received back all the lands he had previously lost, and a cash sum to boot. A version of the story of Isembard's reconciliation was in fact already known to Charles the Fat and formed a central plank of his relationship with St-Gall. The reason for the man's dispossession and exclusion was that he was the son of count Warin, 'persecutor patroni vestri Othmari.' The gift to St-Gall of land at Stammheim, whence Warin and his associates had operated in the mid-eighth century, was made by Charles in 879 as an act of symbolic reconciliation with Otmar for the nefarious deeds of his predecessors.⁸⁹ The atonement of Charles the Fat was a reinforcement of the atonement of the historical Isembard, which had also taken the form of gifts to the monastery.⁹⁰ Notker's story in this chapter can thus be read as a knowing reference to and affirmation of this aspect of Charles the Fat's relationship with St-Gall, recast and relocated at the centre of the court rituals of Charlemagne. The rift between the successors of Warin, including Charles, and Otmar had, Notker asserted, been completely healed.

Certain stories in the *Gesta* were intended, then, to flatter and exhort Charles the Fat by turns, doing so in allegorical fashion, by taking aspects of the current political situation and overlaying them with resonant events, real or fictive, from the reign of Charlemagne. This elision of time, people and places running through the *Gesta* is entirely in keeping with Notker's conception of history as a flat canvas on which to demonstrate the points he was trying to convey; for authors like him, history was typological, a tool to be used to pass comment on the

⁸⁷ The two men were certainly allies in 890 when they supported the revolt of Charles's son Bernard: Borgolte, *Grafen*, p.263.

⁸⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.8, pp.60-2.

⁸⁹ See above, c.6.6.4.

present, not a question of striving after chronological accuracy or even of faithfulness to his sources.⁹¹ His didactic purpose was furthered if his readers could read themselves represented in the pages of the *Gesta*. Moreover, as we saw in the case of the historicising of Liutbert of Mainz, the audience was primed to understand the *Gesta* as a commentary on current events: Charles the Fat had known this when he commissioned the work. Whether or not the Charlemagne references were based on confirmable facts from sources oral or written, as some were, is therefore not really the point. Notker's work ought to be read as a whole, a coherent artifice with a specific audience in mind, an audience which understood the intention of his apparent historical 'errors'.

7.5: Notker and the imperial succession

Alongside these elliptical allusions to events in contemporary politics, the *Gesta Karoli* also contains a number of direct addresses to the emperor expressing Notker's fears about the way his schemes to solve the imperial succession were going. The plan to have Bernard legitimised took shape in the late summer and autumn of 885, and was to have taken the form of a dissolution of the royal marriage and a subsequent papal sanction for the union which had produced the emperor's bastard son. Notker included in the *Gesta* the story of Charlemagne's repudiation of the daughter of the Lombard king Desiderius, which he did 'quia esset clinica et ad propagandam prolem inhabilis, iudicio sanctissimorum sacerdotum.'⁹² The course of events confirmed that that the opposition to this act mounted by Desiderius was wrongful and contrary to the will of God as Charlemagne peremptorily crushed him in dramatic fashion. With this story Notker provided an apology by analogy for Charles the Fat's projected annulment of his marriage: it was an acceptable procedure if the union was barren, as was

⁹⁰ DD SG 31 and 190; Walther, 'Fiskus', pp.263-4.

⁹¹ Notker's historical outlook is discussed by Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.109-44 and Ganz, 'Humour'.

⁹² Notker, *Gesta*, 2.17, pp.81-2. Cf. the story of Godafrid's divorce, 2.13, p.76.

Charles the Fat's, and it had been approved of by Charlemagne himself, not to mention by his devout clergy and the will of God.⁹³

However, the projected 885 divorce for which Notker here provided a form of historical justification did not actually take place, prevented by the premature death of the cooperative Pope Hadrian III. As we argued earlier, Charles's response, before his change of tack in mid-887, was to continue trying for a son by Richgard, something which was increasingly unlikely after more than two decades of marriage, and to keep open negotiations with the new pope in the hope of obtaining his help for a revival of the Bernard plan.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the claims of the other possible contenders for the throne, principally Arnulf of Carinthia, were persistently disregarded by the emperor.

This policy, which was becoming clear as book 1 of the *Gesta* was completed in early 886, did not meet with the approval of Notker the Stammerer. In his description of Louis the German's character, Notker describes the king's reputation for subduing rebellions quickly and terrifying his heathen enemies beyond the frontiers: 'et merito, quippe qui numquam linguam suam iudicio aut manus suas effusione sanguinis christiani commacularet praeter unam et ultimam necessitatem. Quam prius enarrare non audeo quam aliquem parvulum Ludowiculum vel Carolastrum vobis astantem video.'⁹⁵ The story which Notker here recoiled from telling was that of the battle of Fontenoy (841), a conflict which was still remembered with dread in Carolingian political circles. Fontenoy was the culmination of the bloody civil war which had been fought by Louis the Pious's sons and grandson for the throne and, as such, was hitherto the most infamous succession crisis in Carolingian history.⁹⁶ By here juxtaposing it with a reminder of Charles the Fat's lack of a legitimate heir, Notker pointedly expressed to the emperor his fear that this disaster was about to be superseded by one even greater: if Charles died without an heir, the outcome would be the final extinction of the legitimate Carolingian male line. That this heir had to be legitimate (and

⁹³ Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', pp.143-4 drew a similar conclusion, but thought the passage related to the actual divorce of 887. On that occasion, however, virginity and not barrenness was the justification offered by Charles for his actions; see above, c.6.6.1.

⁹⁴ See above, c.6.5.

⁹⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.11, p.68.

⁹⁶ Hincmar, *Instructio*, col.986 also demonstrates the enduring impact of Fontenoy.

that, by implication, Bernard would not do) is stressed by Notker's use of the main-line Carolingian names Louis and Charles. As long as such an heir was lacking, the Stammerer also implied that a repeat of the intra-family warfare of Fontenoy was imminent, as the claims of illegitimate Carolingians such as Arnulf, who were at least the sons of kings, reached boiling point. His pessimism about the production of such an heir was palpable.⁹⁷

Notker was similarly pessimistic about the chances of Bernard succeeding in the wake of Hadrian III's death. Describing in the very next chapter the destruction of 'monasterium tunc nobilissimum', in other words Prüm, the monk lamented: 'nunc autem, non incertum de qua causa, destructum. Quam antea non absolvam quam Berhardulum vestrum spata femur accinctum conspiciam.'⁹⁸ This is a reference, as argued in chapter 6.2, to Charles's intention to establish Bernard as subking of Lotharingia when he was old enough. But, and this was Notker's emphasis, Bernard was *not* old enough. His trepidation here and in the previous chapter derived from the fact that at the time he was writing Charles's succession plans remained conditional and unresolved, a situation which could only increase tension in a political community beset by external attack and desperate to know who would replace the ageing emperor.⁹⁹

Notker emphasised this point by referring in the same chapter to an earlier occasion when the lack of a Carolingian boy as tall as a sword had led to the attempt by certain 'gigantes' to try to seize control of the kingdom. This passage contains no obvious historical reference, and seems to work as another dire warning to Charles the Fat that his succession had to be resolved soon or the

⁹⁷ Notker must have doubted the probability of the marriage producing an heir after such a long barren period: even in the *Continuatio* of 881 he had laid more stress on the wisdom of designating Arnulf; see above, c.6.3. Notker, *Gesta*, 2.10, pp.65-7 also stressed the example of Louis the German, whose saintly lifestyle had been tempered by a realisation that there were 'eis rebus et negociis, sine quibus res publica terrena non subsistit, coniugio videlicet usuque armorum.' This passage is immediately followed by the section discussed earlier, in which Notker refers to the privileges granted to St-Gall in 873 by Louis and Charles. The issuing of these charters formed part of Charles's reintroduction to secular affairs after the famous episode early in that year when he had attempted to renounce those very things, arms and marriage, which Notker had singled out as important to Louis. His emphasis on these practical aspects of Louis's behaviour may, it follows, show that he feared Charles had not given up the desire for renunciation which he had expressed in 873.

⁹⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.12, p.74.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 2.14, pp.77-8 is a good example of Notker's warnings about the imminence of the Viking threat.

Franks would lose God's favour; an heir as tall as a sword (i.e. at the age of majority) was exactly what was missing in 885-6.¹⁰⁰ The identification of the giants with female-line Carolingians, who were by the standards of 'legitimists' like Notker ineligible for kingship, is a distinct possibility and is implied by Notker's description of them as '[whom] filios Seth de filiabus Cain narrat scriptura procreatos.'¹⁰¹ It was this kind of man who stood to benefit if Charles did fail to make a viable succession plan. If, Notker implied, Charles died and left the way clear to royal claims based on female-derived Carolingian descent, Pandora's Box would be opened, as the number of candidates would be multiplied exponentially.¹⁰²

These expressions of unease in chapters 11 and 12 of book 2 were contrasted implicitly by Notker with the precocity of Louis the German described in chapter 10, in which Louis's greatness and royal destiny were revealed as certain while he was still a child at the court of his grandfather. For Charlemagne, Louis guaranteed the future for at least two generations.¹⁰³ Charles the Fat had no such assurances. Notker also described Louis's visit to St-Gall in 857 or 859 with two of his sons in such terms of stability. He depicts the sons as two flowers growing from the king's trunk, which 'summa gloria decoravit et transcendendo contextit.'¹⁰⁴ The idealised family image presented by Charlemagne to Greek envoys is also striking in this context. He stood before them surrounded by his three sons, 'iuvenes filii eius, iam regni participes effecti', his daughters and their mother, followed by the hierarchy of the court, all posed in great splendour and dignity.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, this Greek embassy visited the Frankish court in 812, at a time when Charlemagne had no wife and only one surviving son. Notker would have known this from even a cursory glance at the *Annales Regni Francorum*.

¹⁰⁰ The reference to divine favour is implied by the allusion to the giants in Genesis 6.4.

¹⁰¹ Notker's comparison of them to 'qui dixerunt: quae nobis pars in David aut quae hereditas in filio Isai?' may imply the same thing, men rejecting the authority of the main Carolingian (Davidic) line.

¹⁰² I take the giants to be all potential female-line Carolingian claimants and not, as is sometimes said, the *reguli* themselves. Cf. Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.146. Arnulf, Bernard and Charles the Simple were the only male-line possibilities: female-line descent opened the door to the likes of Berengar, Louis of Provence, Baldwin of Flanders and numerous others.

¹⁰³ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.10, pp.65-7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 1.34, p.47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 2.6, pp.55-7.

Here, as in the other examples, historical accuracy was not the point. The Stammerer sought in these vignettes to create idealised images of family solidarity and continuity, fixing them at points in the Carolingian past which would make clear how sharply they contrasted with the current state of affairs. A resolution of the problem was essential, Notker was saying, to the maintenance of political stability, to close the door on the 'giants'. The urgency of his message would not have been lost on Charles the Fat.

Notker did not, however, stop there: he also proposed a solution to the problems he outlined in chapters 11 and 12 of book 2. In chapter 14, Notker reports a dire prophecy of Charlemagne, moved to tears at the thought of what terrible damage the Vikings might do to his descendants. He continues in the second person: *'Gladius vester in sanguine Nordostranorum duratus obsistat, adiuncto sibi mucrone Karlomanni fratris vestri, tincto quidem in eorundem cruore sed nunc non propter ignaviam sed propter inopiam rerum angustiamque terrarum fidelissimi vestri Arnoldi ita in rubiginem versus, ut tamen iussu et voluntate potentiae vestrae haut difficulter possit ad acumen et splendorem perducere. Hic enim solus ramusculus cum tenuissima Bennolini [Bernard] astula de fecundissima Hludowici radice sub singulari cacumine protectionis vestrae pullulascit.'*¹⁰⁶ For Notker, Arnulf was the answer. Charles, as we discussed earlier, had brought his nephew to his knees by the end of 885 as a response to his unwanted interference in the so-called Wilhelminer War.¹⁰⁷ Notker appealed to the emperor's necessity, reminding him of the imminence of the Viking danger and recalling allusively the help Arnulf had given him at the siege of Asselt in 882. The recurring sword metaphor itself is also instructive. Louis the German's interest in swords in preference to gold had marked him out for greatness in Notker's eyes.¹⁰⁸ It was for want of a Carolingian as tall as a sword that the 'giants' had infested the land, and Bernard's minority had been defined in terms of being too young to have a *'spata femur accinctum'*. Arnulf, by contrast, was himself 'the sword of Karlmann', the only potential male-line heir old and experienced enough to be a success. Arnulf was the emperor's best bet for

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 2.14, p.78.

¹⁰⁷ See c.6.3.

keeping out the claims of the ‘giants’, and it was in Charles’s power to make his rusty sword new again. To drive the point home, the author described Bernard in the same passage as a ‘tenuissima astula’ ‘de fecundissima Hludowici radice’ and reminded Charles again that the ‘futurus Karolaster aut Ludowiculus’ which he so desired was yet unborn.

Book 2’s depiction of long Carolingian family continuity about to come to an abrupt end culminated in chapter 14. As he had in the *Continuatio*, Notker urged the admission of Arnulf to the position of official heir (or co-heir, with Bernard) as a man able to combat the forces threatening the empire as he wrote.¹⁰⁹ He combined allusions to an invented ‘good old days’ of united Carolingian solidarity and continuity with direct pleas to the emperor. That, as we have seen, Notker’s fears about Arnulf’s reaction to continued exclusion were ultimately realised confirms that the *Gesta Karoli* reveals the author as not merely an important writer and historian, but also an astute political commentator.

7.6: Charles the Fat and Charles the Great

The foregoing discussion suggests that the identifiable political concerns expressed in the *Gesta Karoli*, as well as the specific contemporary references, support the dates of composition argued for at the start of this chapter. Notker’s fears about the state of the imperial succession, with which book 2 is shot through, only became relevant in 885-6, after the death of Carloman II, the fall from favour of Arnulf and the failure of the first attempt to legitimise Bernard. One final aspect of this political situation brings us back to the question of why Charles the Fat might have commissioned Notker’s work.

We have already seen how Charles wanted to hear stories lampooning the Archbishop of Mainz and how, in this as in the other allusive stories discussed above, the emperor was implicitly elided with his great-grandfather Charlemagne. The grandest aspect of this comparison, however, is contained within Notker’s historical outlook. The *Gesta* expounds throughout a novel and unique interpretation of the Carolingians’ place in world history. Jerome’s commentary

¹⁰⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.18, pp.88-9.

¹⁰⁹ Notker, *Continuatio*, p.330.

on the book of Daniel had explained the four parts of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as representing four world empires, the last of which, Rome, would last until the end of history. Notker revised this (in hindsight evidently mistaken) interpretation by putting forward the idea, in the very first chapter of book one, that Charlemagne represented ‘alterius non minus admirabilis statuæ caput aureum’: God had destroyed the statue which symbolised the first four world empires and had created a second, with the Carolingians at its head.¹¹⁰ This was a concept of *renovatio imperii* which pitched its claim neither as a purely Christian nor a Roman empire: the Frankish empire of Charlemagne was universal, and stood at the pinnacle of world and sacred history.¹¹¹ Book 1, as noted earlier, then proceeded to expand on this theme by demonstrating the rise of Charlemagne and an empire built on learning and wisdom which became the foundation of its church, finally leading to his assumption of the imperial title.¹¹²

The more secular aspects of this theme are further developed in book 2, beginning with Rome’s loss of God’s favour manifest in the death of Julian the Apostate.¹¹³ A series of chapters follow which lampoon the lazy and decadent rulers of previous world empires in Africa, Persia and Byzantium, establishing their moral inferiority to Charlemagne and their status as tribute-paying client princes of the Franks.¹¹⁴ Significantly, Notker ends this section with a prophetic quotation from Virgil, which he thought was fulfilled by the rise of the Carolingian world empire: ‘Aut Ararim Parthus bibet aut Germania Tigrim’. The Arar, he hastily adds, is to be identified with the Aare and not, as some ‘grammatici ignari’ have it, the Saône. The proof of this is that in the reign of Louis the German a tax was raised from land towards the freeing of Christians in the Holy Land: ‘hoc pro antiqua dominatione atavi vestri Karoli avique vestri Hludowici ab eo miserabiliter implorantes.’¹¹⁵ In other words it was Louis the German and the eastern Carolingians (in whose kingdom, of course, the Aare flowed) who had truly inherited the mantle of world leadership from

¹¹⁰ Notker, *Gesta*, 1.1, p.1.

¹¹¹ Löwe, ‘Theoderich’, pp.73-4; Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.109-44; Goetz, *Strukturen*, pp.69-85.

¹¹² Haefele’s introduction, pp.xvii-xxiii.

¹¹³ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.1, p.49.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 2.6-9, pp.53-65; see Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.114-27.

¹¹⁵ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.9, p.65.

Charlemagne. Louis, in succession to Charlemagne, was the new 'caput Francorum.'¹¹⁶

Notker proceeds immediately, in chapter 10, to discuss Louis the German's personal qualities, his precociousness and his early designation as ruler by Charlemagne.¹¹⁷ *Therefore* ('itaque') Louis was 'rex vel imperator totius Germaniae, Rhetiarumque et antiquae Franciae nec non Saxoniae, Turingiae, Norici, Pannoniarum atque omnium septentrionalium nationum.'¹¹⁸ The use of the word 'itaque' in this context is significant, as is the phrase 'rex vel imperator': both usages explicitly identify Louis the German as the heir of Charlemagne, marking out his family as the superior Carolingian family branch. This reading of Notker's political ideas is supported by the work of Eggert, who showed that the *Gesta's* focus on the east Frankish line was also reflected in St-Gall's charter formulas. Some of these were penned by Notker himself, and propound a view of history in which Charles the Fat was the *second* emperor Charles (Charles the Bald was ignored), and in which he, like Louis the German before him, ruled a multi-regnal *imperium* which had east Francia at its centre.¹¹⁹

Notker went on to quote Isaiah 51,1: 'Adtendite ad petram, unde excisi estis.'¹²⁰ The message for Charles the Fat was clear: he was the heir of Louis as Louis was of Charlemagne, the ruler of a divinely ordained world empire whose centre was, in Notker's eyes, east Francia. The message was also deliberately obvious: the relevant chapters come in sequence, and their overall impact is unmistakable, quite apart from any individual didactic point each might make. The assertion was all the easier to make with the benefit of hindsight, since in 885-6 it had become undeniable that Charles was indeed the heir of Charlemagne, as his only surviving adult male legitimate descendant. One of Notker's aims in the *Gesta* was thus to fix this known outcome in the context of ninth-century history, explaining and legitimising the success of Charles in claiming the mantle of his great-grandfather in terms of the divine masterplan.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 1.34, p.47. 'Caput' refers to the head of the new symbolic statue and thus of the new world empire: cf. ibid, 1.1, p.1; 1.24, p.32; 2.3, p.52.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 2.10, pp.65-7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 2.11, p.67.

¹¹⁹ Eggert, 'Reichsgedanken'; cf. idem, 'Franken', pp.518-9. Cf. Penndorf, *Problem*, pp.149-58.

¹²⁰ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.18, p.89. Louis is described here as 'vere caesar.'

The connection between the two rulers was all the clearer given the coincidence that they had the same name, something which is of course much more obvious in Latin than in English translation. The elision of Charles (the Great) and Charles (the Fat) has already been discussed as one of the principal narrative strategies of the *Gesta Karoli*; the same implicit point can hardly have been missed by a contemporary court audience reading Notker's explanation of the Carolingian world empire. The link had already occurred to Notker in 881 when he wrote his *Continuatio*, a text which culminated in and celebrated the anointing of Charles as emperor in that same year.¹²¹ It was even more appropriate to the year 885, when Charles's assumption of the west Frankish kingdom reunited the entire Carolingian Empire in the hands of one man for the first time since 840 and gave territorial substance to his imperial title. The *Gesta Karoli* is, therefore, a product of that same strand of ideology which we have already noted as present in the thinking of Charles the Fat in the year 885, when he began to think of himself as consecrated to the whole empire.¹²²

Notker also reveals that it had been Charlemagne whom Charles the Fat was really interested in hearing about, and that his chapters on other kings were digressions.¹²³ It is therefore eminently possible that Charles himself, who, as we have seen, had been in direct and indirect contact with Notker on several occasions, was involved in the elaboration of these ideas, or at least that he was aware of them before he commissioned them to be written up into a coherent text. This is made more plausible by another famous product of the St-Gall scriptorium which belongs to this period. The so-called *Psalterium Aureum* contains illustrations accompanying twelve of the psalms which, although they concern scenes from the life of King David, were executed in a style which suggests an iconographic representation of the Old Testament ruler as a Carolingian, most probably Charles the Fat.¹²⁴ The various scenes point in two directions, both back

¹²¹ Notker, *Continuatio*, pp.329-30.

¹²² See above, c.6.4. Notker, *Gesta*, 1.10, p.13 refers to anointing as an ancient practice, which in late ninth-century east Frankish terms it was not; Goetz, *Strukturen*, p.23 and n.65. This reference to, presumably, the Old Testament, may nevertheless reflect the court's preoccupation with consecration ideas in 885.

¹²³ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.16, pp.80-1.

¹²⁴ The work is often dated to 880x890: Reinle, *Kunstgeschichte*, p.285. Eggenberger, *Psalterium*, pp.13-4 identifies the recipient as either Charles the Fat or Conrad I. The objections of Schaab,

to the Old Testament and to the present day, a concept which was common to Carolingian political thought. David and the current ruler were consciously elided by the artist and installed into the picture cycle as a royal archetype, rising to kingship, defeating enemies and ultimately achieving Christ-like status.¹²⁵ Its individual elements, moreover, may refer to actual events in the current king's lifetime; the illustration of Psalm 26 (Samuel anointing David), for instance, to an actual consecration.¹²⁶ This particular example was, as has already been explained, especially relevant to the reign of Charles the Fat, in the year 885.¹²⁷ Notker and Charles both knew that Charlemagne had had himself compared with David.¹²⁸ Notker had also compared himself to Idithun, David's singer, and Charles the Fat to Charlemagne.¹²⁹ An elision of Charles the Fat with David (a typical Carolingian conceit) such as that found in the Golden Psalter would thus fit this complex of associations and give support to the notion that Charles identified himself with his great-grandfather.¹³⁰ The *Psalterium Aureum* may therefore also have been inspired by the ideological statements of the year 885: it is surely no coincidence that its images have a distinctly imperial, rather than royal, character.¹³¹ That this idea should be reflected in the *Gesta Karoli* as well therefore comes as little surprise. In 885 Charles already had the title and the empire: now the *Gesta* provided him with an appropriate ideology, rooting his power in the course of sacred and secular history.

Notker was, however, no mindless mouthpiece of imperial propaganda. His admonitory chapters on the succession situation (11-14) come immediately after his explication of the greatness of the world empire (6-11). The implication

'Hofschule', that the codex was conceived and begun at the court school of Charles the Bald, are convincing, but do not negate Eggenberger's argument that it was presented in its existing form as a gift for a later ruler. It was probably at St-Gall, where it was completed and reworked, by Charles the Fat's time.

¹²⁵ Eggenberger, *Psalterium*, esp. pp.168-77.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp.82-3.

¹²⁷ Other images refer to the king as adulterer, besieger and hunter. The God- or Christ-like king (which makes sense in a Davidic context too) is also a principal theme of the *Gesta Karoli*: Siegrist, *Herrscherbild*, pp.79-89; Innes, 'Emperor'.

¹²⁸ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.19, p.89. Cf. 2.6, p.57; 2.12, p.71. This came from a reading of Alcuin's letters: Ganz, 'Humour', pp.180-1.

¹²⁹ *Collectio Sangallensis*, additamenta no.6; Notker, *Continuatio*, pp.329-30 respectively.

¹³⁰ I.e. if Notker = Idithun, then Charles = David. Notker's musical sequences, the *Liber Ymnorum*, had been sent for use at Charles's court in 884.

¹³¹ Eggenberger, *Psalterium*, pp.168, 173.

of this structuring is that, in Notker's eyes, the continuation of Carolingian world domination was conditional, dependent not only on the moral integrity of its people but also on Charles the Fat's successful handling of the succession situation. The dangerous implication of the 'second statue' ideology was that there were, if the Franks lost God's favour, three more world empires to come. Charles was the heir to world power, but its continuation was not yet assured: indeed, Notker feared the worst. He told Charles the Fat what he wanted to hear, but he also told him what he thought he *ought* to hear.

In this circumspection, Notker also reflects the political circumstances of 885-6. We have already seen how the optimistic grand rhetoric of the late summer and autumn of 885 quickly lost its meaning and was dropped as the failure of the Bernard plan and the humbling of Arnulf cast a shadow of doubt into the minds of the Carolingian political community.¹³² The *Gesta Karoli* was conceived and composed in the midst of this rapidly declining situation. It is no coincidence that the confident assertion of Carolingian world power contained in the structure of book 1, planned in mid-late 885, was infiltrated by the exhortatory digressions and nervous second person addresses of book 2, written in 886.¹³³ The change in Notker's outlook reflected the change in the state of the emperor's political situation. Notker feared that Charles's grip on the world empire was becoming ever weaker as time passed. Time ultimately proved the accuracy of Notker's comments, for it was the excluded Arnulf who finally broke that grip in November 887 and inaugurated the age of the *reguli*, in whose number were included some of the very female-line Carolingians against whom the Stammerer had warned.

7.7: Conclusion

The *Gesta Karoli* may be read, then, as much more of a political document than has previously been allowed. Under its veneer of general moral and didactic exhortation runs a substratum of contemporary political commentary, by turns allusive and direct, expressed in the contents of the anecdotes and reinforced by

¹³² See above, c.6.4.

¹³³ This contrast was noted, but not explained, by Haefele in his introduction, pp.xiv-xv.

their ordering. It may be regarded as a mirror for princes, but it is also more than simply that.

Some aspects remain to be discussed. Firstly, if we are to believe that Charles the Fat and members of his entourage understood the implicit points being made by Notker, they would have to have been conversant with events from the actual reign of Charlemagne. For instance, the implied parallel between the two emperors in the story about Godafrid's occupation of the Moselle region only achieves its impact if its readers are familiar with the real actions of Godafrid I in 810, presumably from Einhard and/or the *Annales Regni Francorum*. Fortunately, this is demonstrable. Einhard's *Vita* was one of the bestsellers of the ninth century and copies were present at the court of Louis the German.¹³⁴ It had been a text used in the education of the young Charles the Bald, and may well have played a similar role in the upbringing of Charles the Fat.¹³⁵ In fact, Notker virtually tells us as much in book 2 of the *Gesta* when he refers to 'proavus vester Karolus, omnia vobis scientibus quaecumque fecit.'¹³⁶

Moreover, Notker's explication of the Carolingian world empire, a theme which runs right through his work, was ultimately reliant on Jerome's commentary on Daniel. We have a St-Gall library catalogue from c.880 which reveals (in Notker's own hand) that Charles and his associates were accustomed to borrowing some of its volumes.¹³⁷ They are not recorded as having consulted the exegesis on Daniel, but the list is only a snapshot of a particular moment in the library's history, so it is entirely plausible that they did just that. Moreover, we do know that Queen Richgard borrowed a volume of four of Jerome's other commentaries, and that Liutward of Vercelli had read his letters.¹³⁸ These Hieronymian interests make their acquaintance with the Daniel text even more likely. In any case, we have already seen that Charles himself had had many

¹³⁴ Bischoff, 'Bücher', pp. 173, 199.

¹³⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, 'Prince', p.156; Ganz, 'Humour', p.173.

¹³⁶ Notker, *Gesta*, 2.16, p.80. Ibid, 2.17, p.85 may be a reference to professional historians at court, from Notker is quick to distance himself: 'illis scribendum reliquo, qui non aliquo amore sed questus tantum gratia vestram celsitudinem comitantur.' Cf. Löwe, 'Karlsbuch', p.136.

¹³⁷ Rankin, 'Ego', pp.292-5.

¹³⁸ Lehmann, *Bibliothekskataloge*, p.73: 'De lib. Hieronimi. In Jonam, Naum, Sophoniam et Aggeum libri IIII in volumine I habet Rickart.' 'Epistolarum Hieronimi ad diversos, volumina IIII, duo Liutwardus habet'.

opportunities to meet Notker, and that one definite conversation in 883 is recorded. Charles and his court were familiar with Notker's ideas and intentions and would certainly have understood even the most allusive of his comments.

Secondly, what was the intended use of the *Gesta*? Previous commentators have rightly pointed out that it was supposed to amuse the court, the anecdotal form providing an aid to its easy digestion. Whatever their more serious points, the lampoons of the idiotic bishop of Mainz, the vacuous foreign rulers and the ludicrous Vikings misunderstanding the point of baptism must have been designed to elicit laughter. As a text with a small but prestigious court audience it stands along with many of the other works of political theory and commentary produced by the so-called Carolingian Renaissance. The *Gesta* represents a quite traditional mingling of exaltation of the ruler on the one hand and, on the other, exhortations to better Christian kingship in general as well as to the accomplishment of specific goals.

Ultimately, however, Notker's messages never reached the court. Although there is no way to determine absolutely whether the sudden mid-sentence break in book 2 was the point at which Notker stopped working or is the result of a corruption in the manuscript tradition, the former seems more likely. Evidence for contemporary circulation is totally lacking, while the upsurge of interest in the text in the twelfth century seems to have been associated with the growth of the cult of Charlemagne.¹³⁹ We need not, as explained above, ascribe the breaking off of the text to the deposition of Charles the Fat, as it must have been written *before* the end of May 887.¹⁴⁰ A more likely cause of its non-delivery to its commissioner is the expulsion of Liutward of Vercelli from court and his replacement by Liutbert of Mainz, which took place in that very month. The emperor would not have looked favourably on criticism of Liutbert now that he had become his archchancellor, archchaplain and chief adviser. Accordingly, it is at this point that Liutbert's mouthpiece, the Mainz annalist, ended his diatribe against the emperor and shifted to a pro-Charles outlook.

¹³⁹ Haefele's introduction, pp.xxiii-xxvii.

¹⁴⁰ Charles did confirm St-Gall's privileges on 30 May 887, a date highlighted by Notker, *Gesta*, 2.pref, p.48, as reserved by the monks for commemoration of his friend Werinbert: Innes,

Moreover, the political rhetoric that informed the content and structure of the *Gesta Karoli* had by this time come to seem redundant. The high-minded imperial claims and Charlemagne associations which had been appropriate to the political situation at the time of commissioning in 885 were consciously toned down by the emperor in 886.¹⁴¹ As Notker wrote the second part of the *Gesta* in that year it was becoming increasingly clear that Charles the Fat's persistent failure to solve his succession problem was a major threat to political stability. While Notker's astute political commentary remained relevant, by early 887 the flattering rhetoric looked like bluster and was hopelessly out of date. The gap between ideal and reality had become too wide for the propaganda to be convincing. If Charles the Fat did ever read a version of the *Gesta Karoli*, he may well have considered himself appropriately flattered and morally edified. However, he is unlikely to have found its anecdotes terribly amusing as the accuracy of Notker's dire predictions in book 2 was proved by the sequence of events which brought his reign to a disastrous and premature end.

'Memory', pp.20-1. This need not mean that Charles had read the work: he was, it is clear, well-enough acquainted with St-Gall traditions and observances long before 887.

¹⁴¹ See above, c.6.4.

8: CONCLUSION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE YEAR 888

It should here be stressed again that the intention of this thesis has not been to argue that Charles the Fat was a 'great king'. Clearly, his record against the Vikings was not unequivocally impressive, even if it was no worse than that of similarly-placed rulers, while his stubborn attempts at solving the succession problem after 885 were, with the benefit of hindsight, misjudged, and ultimately the cause of his downfall. Nevertheless, those very attempts were implemented with no small degree of imagination and political savvy, as seen most clearly in the staged ideological claims of late 885 and early 886. Moreover, the situation had only become so critical because of the vagaries of chance which had so depleted the ranks of the dynasty in the early 880s and caused the unravelling of the Vienne agreement which had been concluded during the war against Boso. That agreement, in the conception of which Charles had played a leading role, was remarkable both for its farsightedness and effectiveness; its ultimate collapse was a result only of the unexpected deaths of three of its participants. Charles's response to the challenges of governing the whole empire, which he had been forced to face because of the way events had transpired, was nothing if not positive. His itinerary reveals him to have been exceptionally mobile, while his establishment of the *marchiones* shows practicality and, unsurprisingly, a willingness to adhere to traditional Carolingian methods of ruling through the aristocracy. Charles has been judged on the wrong criteria. He may not have been a great or particularly innovative king, but he was surely by no means a bad or failed one.

In view of this, Charles can no longer be allowed to stand as an emblem for a general 'decline' of Carolingian power in the later ninth century. The problems he faced, and the solutions he tried, were broadly similar to those which had characterised every other reign of the period. Another recurring theme of this thesis has been to stress the need for historians to inject more of a short-term perspective into accounts of the empire's later years. Too many scholars still rely on teleological models of long-term change in interpreting the evidence from this period, ignoring the sources' more specific contexts. Only when the political narrative for these decades

is more satisfactorily and critically worked out will it be valid to generalise about their place in the overall course of Carolingian history. As it stands at the moment, the accepted grand narrative of decline and fall is clearly not founded on an assimilation of all (or even most of) the available evidence. The historiographical constructs of a 'decline in royal authority' and consonant 'rise of the aristocracy' before 888 must at best be readdressed and reproven, and at worst they must be nuanced to the point where they are valueless.

It has been implicit in my argument that a powerful territorial aristocracy was an underlying feature of the early medieval world, and that it remained firmly cast in a traditional mould during the 880s.¹ The political structures of tenth-century kingdoms were, however, undeniably different in detail from those which had existed even half a century earlier. Given that, as Reynolds has stressed, our appreciation of structural change ought not to be divorced from the course of events, it is worth reflecting by way of conclusion on the broader significance of Charles the Fat's deposition for the development of the post-Carolingian kingdoms.² This can be assessed most clearly in west Francia, where the accession of Odo marked a decisive political turning point. It is undeniable that in the tenth century the Robertian/Capetian house was able to dominate the west Frankish kingdom at the expense of the authority of the last Carolingian kings. However, the crucial factor in allowing this situation to develop was the decision made by Odo as king to grant the key *honores* and fiscal lands which he had held since 886 to his brother, the *marchio* Robert.³ By doing so, he transformed one of the crucial heartlands of Carolingian power into a Robertian stronghold. The relative political weakness of Charles the Simple and his successors in the tenth century, as well as the rise to power of the Capetians, can in large part be traced back to this event.⁴ It could only take place, however, because Odo became king in 888: it was not a determining factor in his acquisition of that kingship. In this perspective, then, the consolidation of high

¹ Cf. Fouracre, 'Justice'.

² Reynolds, 'Historiography', p.133.

³ DD CS 45, 50.

⁴ Cf. Dunbabin, *France*, pp.30-1; Schneidmüller, *Tradition*, p.106.

magnate power at the king's expense in west Francia postdates the collapse of Carolingian hegemony caused by the death of the heirless Charles the Fat.

The very substance of this hegemony had also been altered. As Airlie has argued, an overlooked achievement and fundamental basis of Carolingian rule up until 888 was the establishment and maintenance of the political myth that its existence was normal and natural.⁵ This myth was expressed in the language of legitimacy of birth: legitimate Carolingians were perceived to be rightful candidates for kingship throughout the ninth century, which is why aristocratic rebellions usually coalesced round a member of the royal house. Even the usurper Boso tried to legitimise his actions by ascribing to himself a form of 'Carolingianness' based on his relationship to the imperial family via his wife.⁶ The effect was not to brainwash the aristocracy into blind loyalty towards their kings: indeed, at points of tension alternative allegiances, such as those relating to family, or even simple opportunism, could cut across the demands made by rulers and surface as expressions of disloyalty. This is why an opportunist like Boso, reacting to the power-vacuum created by the dispute over the succession to Louis the Stammerer, was able to conceive of seizing a crown for himself in the first place, and why he was able to win over eminent supporters to his cause.

However, we must also take account of the reason for Boso's failure. As we saw in chapter 3, the Carolingians used his rebellion as an opportunity to reassert their authority. Because of the superior force they were able to command on this occasion, the Carolingians' assertion that Boso was a *tyrannus*, an illegitimate ruler, prevailed. In other words, the 'myth' of Carolingian legitimacy only survived because it was backed up by the threat of force against those who challenged it. Only the fact that Carolingian rule was still perceived as 'natural' after Boso's revolt can explain why Charles the Fat was invited to ascend the west Frankish throne in 885: had the aristocracy of that *regnum* lost confidence in the dynasty, they could easily have

⁵ For this paragraph see Airlie, 'Semper'.

⁶ Airlie, 'Behaviour', pp.275-86, 289-90.

turned to one of their own number at that point.⁷ By contrast, when Charles died in 888 leaving behind no adult legitimate male to take his place, there was no longer any basis for solidarity between the new rulers, the *reguli*: each belonged to a different family and none was a legitimate Carolingian.⁸ The Carolingian monopoly on royal legitimacy was broken. As Regino of Prüm famously put it: ‘Post cuius [Charles’s] mortem regna, que eius ditioni paruerant, veluti legitimo destituta herede, in partes a sua compage resolvuntur et iam non naturalem dominum prestolantur, sed unumquodque de suis visceribus regem sibi creari disponit. Quae causa magnos bellorum motus excitavit; non quia principes Francorum deessent, qui nobilitate, fortitudine et sapientia regnis imperare possent, sed quia inter ipsos aequalitas generositatis, dignitatis ac potentiae discordiam augebat, nemine tantum ceteros precellente, ut eius dominio reliqui se submittere dignarentur.’⁹ The *principes*, Odo, Berengar and the others, were opportunists trying to take advantage of a power vacuum in just the same way as Boso had been. The reason for their success, as opposed to Boso’s failure, was that the opportunity in 888 coincided with the absence of any ruler who was strong enough to sustain an uncontested claim to Carolingian legitimacy. The ‘myth’ of Carolingian legitimacy had survived the traumatic events of 879-80, but it could not exist independently of legitimate Carolingians able to lay claim to it.¹⁰ The events of 888 therefore necessarily altered the terms in which royal legitimacy, the right to rule, was perceived.

Two texts associated with the rise of the *reguli* help to demonstrate how the shattering of the Carolingian monopoly on royal authority was perceived as such by contemporaries, and how it manifested itself in an altered rhetoric of royal legitimacy. Abbo of St-Germain-des-Prés was, as we have seen, an apologist for the new kingship of Odo of Paris.¹¹ He passed an implicit comment on Odo’s succession, stressing his place as the immediate successor of Charles the Fat, and leaving unmentioned the

⁷ I therefore disagree with Airlie’s conclusion that Boso’s revolt had a shattering effect on the dynasty’s credibility.

⁸ The term ‘*reguli*’ is used by BC s.a.888, p.116.

⁹ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.888, p.129.

¹⁰ Cf. Brühl, *Deutschland*, p.373.

¹¹ See above, c.4.2.2.

overt opposition faced by the king after his accession.¹² However, Abbo's justification for this succession is blunt, and tellingly similar to the rhetoric of Einhard, another apologist for a new dynasty: Odo received the name and power of king, and the crown and sceptre, thanks to the grace and favour of the 'populus Francorum.'¹³ Abbo then goes on to stress the approval of each of the *regna* of Neustria, Francia and Burgundy. The terms of Odo's kingship, which find an echo in his coronation *Promissio*, are therefore stark: Abbo makes no attempt to build up his legitimacy either by claiming the Carolingians were effete, or by seeking to attach him artificially to the charisma of the old line.¹⁴ The poet's view of Odo's legitimacy is hence already strikingly in a post-Carolingian mould at the end of the 880s. Carolingian royal charisma simply had nothing to do with Abbo's definition of Odo's kingship, whereas it had been absolutely central to the definition of Boso's right to rule in 879. For kings like Odo, self-justification was no longer about whether or not you were a Carolingian.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the capitulary record of Louis of Provence's election to kingship in 890.¹⁵ This text reveals that Louis claimed legitimacy from a variety of sources, including not only the approval of the pope and of Arnulf, but also appeals to both his Carolingian descent (he was 'ex prosapia imperiali') and his relationship to King Boso ('excellentissimi Bosonis regis filius'). The reference to the kingship of Boso, the anti-Carolingian *tyrannus* par excellence, would have been unthinkable before 888, especially alongside a claim to Carolingian blood. After all, Louis's adoption by Charles in 887 was, as we have seen, an attempt to have him recategorised as a legitimate Carolingian, and to eliminate his connection with his 'tyrant' father. By contrast, the Capitulary of Valence demonstrates how, in the post-888 world, Carolingian blood was no longer the whole picture, but had become simply one piece of the jigsaw. For Boso, the key had been to make himself look as Carolingian as possible to justify his claim to kingship: before 888, to be royal

¹² Abbo, *Bella*, pp.98-100; Guillot, 'Étapes', p.218.

¹³ Abbo, *Bella*, p.98; Guillot, 'Étapes', pp.218-9.

¹⁴ D OP 54 for the *Promissio*, with Bautier's cautionary remarks.

¹⁵ *Hludowicus Regis Arelatensis Electio*. See also above, c.6.5.

was to be Carolingian. For post-888 rulers like his son Louis, there was a need to use every possible qualification to convince the political community that they were indeed worthy of being considered kings.

Abbo's poem and the Capitulary of Valence thus reveal how the rhetorical terms in which kingship was claimed and justified were changed by the breaking of Carolingian hegemony in 888. This change also had the potential to affect the practical relationship between kings and aristocrats, as the career of Boso's brother Richard the Justiciar shows. Richard was a man who, geographically favourably placed between vying royal competitors, was able to sit on the fence politically, building up an independent power base by playing off one against another. His command over a group of lesser counts was not sanctioned by any king, and by standing his ground he seems to have been able to compel Odo and Charles the Simple to buy his neutrality and acknowledge his independence by granting him important *honores* such as the monastery of St-Germain in Auxerre.¹⁶ The existence of such more or less autonomous territorial lordships was not, as this thesis has already argued, a new phenomenon in the late ninth century. *Marchiones* like Odo operated with a great deal of independence in their delegated commands. What is remarkable about Richard, however, is that we can observe his acquisition of rights and properties from kings in such detail: we actually see him building up his lordship by wringing concessions from competing rulers. Odo, Charles the Simple and their successors had to more or less acknowledge that men like Richard and, further south, William the Pious, were beyond their reach.¹⁷ These figures flourished in a situation where kings were competing for legitimacy and recognition, and their greater visibility after 888 is significant. Although territorial aristocratic power was not a novelty, the rise of the *reguli* created a situation in which it was able to coalesce into forms approximating the principalities and duchies of the tenth century. By contrast, as Boso's fate had demonstrated, before 888 aristocratic freedom of manoeuvre would never extend to kings' toleration for power which asserted itself outside the hierarchy

¹⁶ See Sassier, *Recherches*, pp.6-11.

¹⁷ Lauranson-Rosaz, 'Roi', pp.425-34.

of royal delegation. In Italy, where several figures fought it out for the crown, a similar situation developed, as summed up by Liudprand of Cremona: ‘semper Italienses geminis uti dominis volunt, quatinus alterum alterius terrore coerceant.’¹⁸

All this serves to show how, after the shattering of the Carolingian monopoly, royal legitimacy was a quality which was up for grabs and available for redefinition. However, in the east Frankish kingdom, authors associated with Arnulf of Carinthia were not so ready to admit that things had changed. The Bavarian continuator of the *Annales Fuldenses* referred only to Arnulf as ‘rex’, and denigrated the other new rulers with the term ‘reguli’. The annalist claimed that each of the *reguli* had made *themselves* into kings (while Arnulf had received nobles from all over the realm), and cast further aspersions on their legitimacy by listing the names of their non-Carolingian fathers.¹⁹ This author was also quick to point out that each of the *reguli* came to Arnulf, implying that the latter exercised an overlordship which applied to all the kingdoms of the empire. Similarly, Regino, writing some 20 years later for figures at the court of Arnulf’s son Louis the Child, cast Arnulf in the role of a legitimate Carolingian emperor, referring to him as the ‘naturalis dominus’ of the *reguli*, and placing heavy emphasis on his name, with its implicit identification with the legendary Carolingian progenitor St. Arnulf of Metz.²⁰ Clearly, then, Arnulf harboured hopes that he could maintain the myth of Carolingian hegemony and use it to serve his own ambitions. As the example of Abbo of St-Germain shows, however, it is unlikely that the *reguli* themselves saw things in quite the same way.

If open apologists for Arnulf tried to deny the rupture in Carolingian politics which had been caused by the events of 887-8, the attitude to the new situation of another prominent figure, Archbishop Fulk of Rheims, is equally instructive. The *Visio Karoli* was produced in Fulk’s circle in 890 and was, as we have seen, probably conceived as a pamphlet associated with the accession of Louis of Provence intended to encourage the young king into a northwards expansion against Odo, whom Fulk

¹⁸ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, 1.37, p.27.

¹⁹ BC s.a.888, p.116.

²⁰ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.888, p.129, 880, p.116.

opposed.²¹ The strident Carolingian ‘legitimism’ of this text, in which Louis is connected to the main imperial/Lotharingian bloodline of the dynasty, contrasts sharply with the official record of proceedings at Valence in which, as we have seen, Carolingian connections were but one reference point among several. The difference in outlook can be explained by Fulk’s specific intentions: by tempting Louis to see himself as a legitimate Carolingian he was dangling before him the carrot of imperial status, with all the implications for an exalted authority which that entailed. His own motives were, however, quite self-interested. Moreover, Louis was aware that the proposition was unrealistic, and was not won over by Fulk’s ambitious rhetoric.

The archbishop had clearly not been motivated by an unchanging and principled conviction that Louis was the rightful Carolingian emperor. Two years earlier, in the aftermath of Charles’s death and of the failed bid of Guy of Spoleto to acquire the west Frankish crown with Fulk’s help, the archbishop had led a faction which appealed to Arnulf to come and take over from Odo.²² In view of this, it may be significant that our only other major source for Arnulf’s supposed *Oberherrschaft* is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which states that the *reguli* ruled only with his consent, and that they acknowledged the superior quality of his kingship.²³ This text’s information on Carolingian politics becomes significantly more substantial in the 880s, suggesting that the compiler had a source with good continental connections. The church of Rheims, and Fulk in particular, had strong connections with the West Saxon court, where the *Chronicle* was being produced at this time.²⁴ Moreover, the most likely source of the continental information is Grimbold of St-Bertin, the scholar who had been commended into King Alfred’s patronage in the later 880s by Fulk himself.²⁵ It is therefore possible that the *Chronicle*’s claims about the position of the *reguli* actually reflect a perspective from Rheims in the years 888-9.

In other words, both the *Visio Karoli* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the two texts which make the most conspicuous statements about the survival of Carolingian

²¹ See above, c.6.5. On Fulk’s position at this time, see Schneider, *Fulco*, pp.68-89.

²² AV s.a.888, pp.64-5; Schneider, *Fulco*, pp.43-62.

²³ ASC s.a.887, p.80; Asser, *De Rebus*, c.85, pp.71-2 elaborates the *Chronicle*’s report.

²⁴ See Nelson, ‘Franks’, pp.148-9. On the *Chronicle* and the court, see Scharer, ‘Writing’.

legitimacy after 888 and which do not come from an Arnulfian connection, can be placed quite specifically into context as the products of the desperate politicking of Fulk of Rheims in his ongoing struggle to rid himself of the unwanted rule of Odo. If anything, therefore, they stand as evidence not for an unbroken continuation of the myth of Carolingian hegemony, as Arnulf's apologists wished to believe, but for the very destruction of that belief. The appeal to Carolingian legitimacy was simply a rhetorical position adopted by the archbishop for quite specific political ends, rather than a still-vital ruling idea. In reality, as the Valence capitulary shows, possession of 'Carolingianness' was no longer the central claim for aspirant kings to make. Its appeal was fresh in the memory, but it was fading fast: Fulk's was a voice in the wilderness. Even Regino, who had paid lip service to the legitimacy of Arnulf's coup, recognised this: it was his famous analysis that the charisma of the new rulers was too equal to avoid wars breaking out between them.²⁶

In the east as in the west, therefore, the concept of Carolingian legitimacy was seriously damaged by the events of 887-8, and the door was opened to a redefinition of royal authority. If Arnulf had maintained at least a fictive continuity, the minority of Louis the Child accentuated the dynamic by allowing the identities and territories of the emergent ducal houses to be shaped and entrenched by a series of fractious feuds. The distance that had been travelled was exposed by the reign of Conrad I, whose attempts to rule Carolingian-style through, rather than with, the *duces* were shown up as spectacularly misjudged and anachronistic.²⁷ His successor Henry I recognised Conrad's mistake and, after negotiations with the leading aristocrats, founded his kingship on bonds of *amicitia* with the most important nobles of the realm. This amounted to a formalisation, or even institutionalisation, of the new relationship of the king, *primus inter pares*, to the high aristocracy which was to characterise the history of the German *Reich* under the Ottonians.²⁸

²⁵ Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, *Councils*, pp.8-11 for the text of Fulk's letter.

²⁶ Arnulf did send Odo a crown, perhaps underlining his perception of his superiority. It may be doubted that Odo saw this in quite the same way, however: AV s.a.888, p.66 only says that the kings 'facti amici'.

²⁷ Reuter, *Germany*, pp.136-7.

²⁸ Leyser, *Rule*; Reuter, 'Sonderweg'.

The Carolingian empire had always been something of an intellectual construct, its unity articulated more through dynastic and regnal ideas than through strong institutional centralisation.²⁹ It was only the end of the political dominance of the Carolingian family caused by the death of Charles the Fat and the accession of the *reguli* which loosened the grip of these ideas and brought about the fragmentation of royal power in Europe. As an overall conclusion to this thesis, it is therefore important to stress that the political crisis caused by the lack of a satisfactory solution to the succession problems of 885-7 preceded, and hence was not caused by, the disappearance of Carolingian hegemony. The empire did not fall apart on the death of Charles the Bald, the revolt of Bosso or the death of Carloman II. It was only the splintering of royal legitimacy in 888 which allowed changes in the rhetoric and, ultimately, structure of politics to develop, giving new opportunities to the high aristocracy to entrench their positions by wresting concessions from competing kings. Regino's much-quoted analysis of the equality of the new rulers was astute: in contrast to 751, no family was strong enough in 888 to take over the Carolingian family business wholesale. What is less frequently stressed is Regino's opening phrase: the rise of the new order took place, he tells us, 'after Charles's death'.³⁰ The families of the high aristocracy did not 'rise' slowly to their royal and ducal positions: they *emerged* from the shadow of the Carolingians after the fizzling out of the legitimate royal line to consolidate their power and enhance the coherence of their principalities. If anything, the 'rise of the aristocracy' was not a cause but a consequence of the fall of the Carolingians. It was the death without heir of Charles the Fat which opened the door to these new dynamics in the nature of royal and aristocratic authority: in this sense, the year 888 can be said to have marked the beginning of a long tenth century.

²⁹ See Wallace-Hadrill, 'Prince', pp.178-9; Rosenwein, 'Politics', p.249.

³⁰ Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a.888, p.129.

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